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The first of the
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SERMONS

ON

PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

BY ROBERT WALKER,

LATE ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF THE HIGH CHURCH OF EDINBURGH.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,
A CHARACTER OF THE AUTHOR,
BY HUGH BLAIR, D. D.

FIRST COMPLETE AMERICAN EDITION.

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SERMON XXXV.

2 CORIN. xii. 9.

HE said unto me, MY grace is sufficient for thee.

IN the foregoing verses of this chapter, the Apostle relates an extraordinary revelation he had been favoured with, above fourteen years before the date of this epistle. He informs us, that “he was caught up into paradise,” or “the third heaven (whether in the body, or out of the body, he could not tell) where he heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful,” or possible, “for a man to utter.” This probably happened soon after his conversion; and was graciously intended, either to remove those doubts and fears which the remembrance of his former conduct might naturally occasion, or rather to fortify his mind against the trials and sufferings he was afterwards to meet with in the course of his ministry. One should imagine, that such a glorious manifestation could not be liable to any abuse. When Satan would have tempted our Lord to worship him, it was by giving him a sight and offer of all the kingdoms of *this* world; and we readily admit, that such a temptation might prove very fatal to us. Earthly objects have indeed too powerful a tendency to inflame our sensual appetites, and to alienate our hearts from God; but surely no danger can be apprehended from a view of heaven. The glories of the upper world, a display of those things above, upon

which God himself hath commanded us to set our affection, cannot be supposed to have any bad effect.

And no doubt this will be the case, when we shall be perfectly freed from all remainders of corruption. But we learn, from what follows, that in our present state of weakness and depravity, even a view of heaven might prove a snare to our souls. Holy Paul, as we read (verse 7.) was in danger of being “exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations; for which cause “there was given to him a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet him.” What this particular exercise was is not material for us to know. The words plainly import, that it was both violent and painful; and the effects it produced as evidently show, that it was appointed in mercy, and wisely calculated for his spiritual advantage. This eminent saint, who but a little before was caught up into paradise, now humbles himself as low as the dust. He falls down upon his knees, and earnestly implores deliverance from this trial. Once and again he repeats his supplication, but gets no answer. This could not fail to heighten his distress. A messenger of Satan is sent to buffet him; and God, by his silence, seems deaf to his intreaties. But still this is made to work for his good: He becomes more and more sensible of his own weakness; he draws nearer to a throne of grace, and renews his suit with increasing fervour and importunity. “For this thing,” says he, (verse 8.) “I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.” At length the answer comes in the words of my text: *And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee.*

You will observe, that, after all his intreaties, the Lord did not grant him the precise thing he had asked; but he gave him what was better, and more suited to his

condition. Paul needed an antidote against spiritual pride; and as the thorn in the flesh was necessary for that end, it would have been no act of kindness to have taken it away: and therefore our Lord, who knew his servant better than he knew himself, prolongs the trial, but at the same time assures him of grace to support him under it. This messenger of Satan must not be sent away, lest thou shouldst forget thy dependance upon me; but I will stand by thee, and strengthen thee to bear his assaults and buffetings; that, feeling thine own weakness, and the power of *my grace*, thy soul may be kept at an equal distance from *presumption* on the one hand, and from *distrust* on the other; both which extremes are utterly inconsistent with the duties of my service, and the happiness of my people.

According to this view of the words, I propose, in dependance upon divine aid,

I. To guard you against pride and self-confidence, by giving you a true representation of that weak and impotent state into which we are fallen by our apostacy from God; and,

II. For your encouragement, I shall lead your thoughts to that *all-sufficient grace* which is treasured up in Christ, whereby the weakest of his people are enabled to endure the buffetings of Satan, and shall finally prevail against all their spiritual enemies.

I. THAT I may guard you against pride and self-confidence, I shall lay before you a plain and scriptural account of that weak and impotent state into which we are fallen by our apostacy from God.

It were easy to quote a variety of passages which expressly assert the corruption of human nature, and man's utter inability to do any thing that can be effectual for his own recovery: but I need only appeal to every man

who reads the sacred oracles with seriousness and impartiality, whether this doth not appear to be a Scriptural doctrine from the very face of the revelation, and the uniform strain of the word of God.

Doth not the method of salvation by Jesus Christ necessarily suppose the whole human race to be in a state of guilt, pollution, and weakness? Do not the promises of taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh, plainly imply, that these works are peculiar to God, and that man is unable to do such great things for himself? Would God command us to pray to him for these inestimable blessings, if we were able to procure them by our own wisdom and strength? nay, would it not be a mocking of God to apply to him for that which we are already possessed of, or may acquire when we choose, without his interposition or aid? Besides, are we not told, that “every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights?” Is not our sanctification every where attributed to the Spirit of God? and are not the saints denominated “God’s workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that they should walk in them?” Are not “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance,” expressly said to be “the fruits of the Spirit?” nay, are we not told, that it is God who worketh in us “to *will* and to *do* of his good pleasure?” Surely, my brethren, if we judge of the Scriptures by the same rules that we judge of any other books; nay, unless we suppose that they were artfully contrived to mislead us; we must be sensible, that the absolute necessity of supernatural grace, is not only clearly asserted in Scripture, but that this doctrine is so intimately connected with all the other parts of divine revelation, that the whole must stand or fall with it.

This is further confirmed by the concurring testimony of all the saints of whose experiences, in the spiritual life, we have any accounts recorded in Scripture. They all join in the most humiliating acknowledgments of their guilt, pollution, and weakness; disclaiming the praise of any good thing that was in them, and ascribing the undivided glory of all that they possessed, or hoped to enjoy, to the free unmerited grace of God. How pathetically did David bewail the corruption of his nature, (Psal. li. 5.) “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” And what a deep sense did he express of his inability to cleanse or purify himself, when he addressed God in such terms as these, (verse 10.) “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” But lest any should be so injurious as to suspect that David might have spoken after this manner, to apologize for his criminal conduct in the matter of Uriah, which gave occasion to that psalm; let us hear what the apostle Paul saith of himself, whose character is not liable to any such objection, (Rom. vii. 18. *et seq.*) “I knew, that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good, I find not.—I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members.” Upon which he cries out, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!” Here then is one who was not behind the very chief apostles; who, before his conversion, lived a Pharisee, and afterwards could say at the bar of the Jewish Sanhedrim, “I have lived in all good conscience before God unto

this day ;” who, conscious of the grace he had received, expressed himself thus in the presence of Agrippa, “ I would to God, that not only thou, but all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.” Yet this chosen vessel ingenuously confesseth his natural depravity, mourns over the remainders of a body of sin, and ascribes those eminent gifts and graces with which his soul was so remarkably enriched, to God, and to him alone, saying, (1 Cor. xv. 10.) “ By the grace of God I am what I am : and his grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain ; but I laboured more abundantly than they all : yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” Now what should have induced Paul to speak after this manner if it had not been true ? Surely this was not the way to make a figure in the world. Had that been his aim, it would have answered his purpose far better to have represented his high attainments as the fruit of his own labour and diligence, rather than a mere alms to which he had no previous title. Surely nothing but a regard to truth could have drawn from him such humble, repeated acknowledgments ; and therefore his testimony is altogether beyond exception. And when I add, that he wrote under the immediate direction and influence of the Spirit of God, we are furnished with the most convincing evidence of the absolute necessity of divine grace, for beginning and carrying forward a work of sanctification in the soul of an apostate creature.

They whose religion lies wholly in speculation, who have acquired a refined system of opinions, but never tried in good earnest to reduce them to practice, may dispute against this doctrine, and flatter themselves into a vain conceit of the vigour and sufficiency of the natural powers they possess. But all who are exercised to

godliness, who have put their strength to the trial, (and they only are competent judges in a question of this nature) know the truth of what I have been proving, and will be ready to attest it from their own experience. Nevertheless, as pride is the last part of the old man that dies, it will be profitable even for such persons to “be put in remembrance of these things, though they know them, and be established in the present truth.” Have you experienced the power of divine grace? have you tasted and seen that the Lord is good? then surely it is meet that your souls should bless him. But, O be humble! and give check to any self-exalting thoughts. Consider both where and what you are. You are still upon earth, part of the wilderness lieth before you, and you must pass through the valley and shadow of death before you can enter into the promised land. Many seeds of corruption still lodge in your nature; many enemies beset you, both within and without; the fiery darts of the wicked one fly thick on every side; and nothing less than Omnipotence can protect and sustain you, and carry you forward in safety to the end of your journey. If you trust in any measure to yourselves, if you depend upon the grace you have already received, as if that would be sufficient for the time to come, you shall soon get a proof of your ignorance and folly. You need daily grace as much as daily bread; for, separated from Christ, you can do nothing. Beware, O Christians! of undertaking any thing in your own strength; for that which is begun in self-confidence will most assuredly end in shame and disappointment. Go forth in the name of the Lord of hosts, saying, with good king Jehoshaphat, (2 Chron. xx. 21.) “O Lord, we know not what to do, but our eyes are towards thee.” And for your encouragement, I shall now,

II. In the *second* place, Lead your thoughts to that all-sufficient grace which is treasured up in Christ; whereby the weakest of his people are enabled to endure the buffetings of Satan, and shall finally be made to triumph over all their spiritual enemies.

This is a most comfortable doctrine, and cannot fail to beget joy and confidence in every believing soul. How completely wretched would the discovery of our weakness make us, had we no knowledge where help is to be found, or no hope that help would be granted to us! But, blessed be God, neither of these is the case. For,

1st. An overflowing fountain of *grace* is set open to our view. “The Word was made flesh,” saith the apostle John, “and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of *grace* and truth.” “It hath pleased the Father,” saith the apostle Paul, “that in him should all fulness dwell.” Nay, “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” Coloss. ii. 9. Here then is not only fulness, but all fulness; nay, the whole fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Christ Jesus: and what words can import a *sufficiency* of grace, if these do not? But may we hope that this grace shall be imparted to us? Yes, we may. For, in the

2d place, The Scriptures assure us, that all this grace is treasured up in Christ for the behoof of his people. I need not mention particular passages of Scripture for the proof of this, seeing it evidently appears from the whole strain of divine revelation, where Christ is uniformly represented as a public person, sustaining the character of Mediator or Surety, living and dying, not for himself, but for the sake of those whom the Father had given him. Hence he is called the *head*, and believ-

ers are styled the *members* of his body. He is compared to the *vine*; and, in a suitableness to this figurative representation, believers are denominated *branches* which grow out of this vine, and derive all their sap and nourishment from it. That remarkable prophecy of Isaiah, (chap. lxi. 1,—3.) which our Lord applied to himself in the synagogue at Nazareth, is a clear and strong confirmation of this truth: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.” Here is a plain declaration, that Christ was anointed, and filled with the Spirit, for this very end, that he might dispense to his people those supplies of grace which their various cases and necessities might require. We are further assured,

3dly. That Christ, upon all occasions, is willing and ready to impart his grace unto them according to their need. Ignorance of this keeps many Christians in a languishing, dejected state. Though they know that the fulness of the Godhead dwelleth in Christ, and that all grace is treasured up in him for the benefit of his people, they are nevertheless haunted with fears and jealousies about his willingness to communicate this treasure to them. These partly arise from the sense of their own unworthiness, and partly from the misrepresentations of Satan, the great adversary, who doth every thing in his power to cherish and strengthen those evil surmis-

ings which keep sinners at a distance from the fountain of mercy, and drive them away from that Almighty Saviour upon whom their help is laid. But, blessed be God! the Scriptures furnish us with arguments more than sufficient to refute all the suggestions of Satan upon this head. The good will of our Lord shines with such glory in every page of this sacred book, that there can remain no rational ground to doubt of it: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If *any* man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This," adds the evangelist, "spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive." John vii. 37, 38, 39. He is represented, in the book of the revelation, as standing at the door, and knocking, with these gracious words in his mouth, "If *any* man will hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me." How sweet is his name, *Jesus*, a Saviour! how endearing the relations he stands in to his people, as their Shepherd and Friend, their Husband, their Brother? Was he not tempted, that he might succour those who are tempted? And can we have any reason to question his love to us, who became flesh of our flesh, and bore our griefs, for this very end, that he might be gracious? Nay, we may appeal to facts for the proof of this doctrine. All the ransomed around the throne, who overcame by the blood and Spirit of the Lamb, give testimony to this great and important truth; and I trust there are many thousands upon earth, who, with humble gratitude and joy, can attest the same, and say with the apostle John, "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." More might be said upon this head; but you have heard enough to show, that believers in

Christ have all possible encouragement to come boldly to a throne of grace, in the assured hope that they shall obtain mercy, and find grace to help them in every time of need. And therefore I shall only add,

4thly. That this grace of Christ, when once obtained, shall infallibly prove victorious, and finally prevail against all opposition. He who is the author, is likewise the finisher of his people's faith; for "his gifts and calling are without repentance." "He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax, till he bring forth judgment unto victory." *Grace*, though a small rivulet in appearance, is fed with an everlasting spring. Where the Lord Jesus begins a good work, he will carry it on to perfection, and never leave the objects of his love till he hath made them like himself, all glorious both within and without, and presented them to his Father without spot and blemish.

THUS have I laid before you two important points of Christian doctrine; *first*, Our weakness in ourselves; and, *secondly*, That sufficiency of grace which is to be found in Christ Jesus. The Spirit was not given by measure unto him; and this precious oil was poured upon his head, that from thence it might flow down to the remotest skirts of his garments, and be communicated to all the members of his body. Nay, he is, upon all occasions, most willing and ready to dispense to his people this inestimable blessing: none who come to him under a sense of need shall be sent empty away. And the first fruits of his *grace* are a certain pledge and earnest of future glory; for "whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." It is not so much the Christian that lives, as Christ that liveth in him; and because he lives, all who believe in him shall live also. "They are kept," not by their own strength, but "by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

How completely amiable doth the Lord Jesus appear when viewed in this light ! How safe and happy are they who are vitally united to him ! “ The young lions do lack and suffer hunger ; but they that fear the Lord shall not want any good thing.” “ O sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of his saints : Let Israel rejoice in him that made and redeemed him ; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.” These reflections are just and natural ; but as I must not stay to enlarge upon all the uses that might be made of this subject, I shall at present confine myself to what appears most important and seasonable ; namely, a few advices to Christians in general, and more especially to those who have newly entered upon a religious course. And,

1st. I would forewarn you of the opposition you are likely to meet with in your way heavenward. You have begun a warfare ; and “ every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood.” Corruption will no doubt assail you from within ; but I am to warn you of danger from another quarter. We read, that when Jesus was born, “ Herod the king was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” In like manner, when Christ is formed in any heart, all hell is in an uproar, and the malignant brood of the old serpent upon earth will not fail to spit out their venom against that person as lavishly as they can. The wicked among whom you live will mock and ridicule you ; and it is probable that your former companions in sin will taunt you with past and pardoned faults, (for pardoned they are if you have come to Christ) and will exert their utmost strength and cunning to mar your confidence, if they cannot carry you back into the same excess of riot with themselves ; nay, with hellish spite they may even

forge lies to blacken your character, that they may not seem to have suffered any loss by your revolt from their party. All this you have reason to expect; and I speak of it beforehand, that when it happens, you may not be surprised or discouraged, as though some strange and unusual thing had befallen you. It is, and always hath been, the lot of God's children; and when you suffer in this manner, you have the honour to suffer in the best of causes, and with the best of company. "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you;" it hated your Lord before it hated you, and the servant is not greater than his Master. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, and because Christ hath called you out of the world, upon these accounts the world hateth you. "Rejoice, therefore, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven."

2dly. Maintain a constant sense of your own weakness. Remember that caution of the Apostle, "Be not high-minded, but fear." You can only work to purpose when you work upon a present strength: the grace you receive to-day will need a fresh supply of grace to revive and actuate it to-morrow; for Christ always dispenseth his peculiar gifts in such a way as to remind his people of their constant dependance upon him, and to render them diligent in the use of all the means he hath appointed for promoting the divine life in their souls. At the same time,

3dly. Think honourably of your Lord, in whose service you are engaged. Believe it, whatever Satan may suggest to the contrary, that his heart is kind, and his hand liberal. It is of the highest importance to have just conceptions of Christ, and to know what mercy and strength are laid up for us in him. Look not so much to

your enemies as to the Captain of your salvation ; set his promises against their threatening, his omnipotent grace against their impotent malice. Be ye therefore bold and very courageous ; victory is insured to you ; it is already sown in that new nature you have got ; and ere long the Prince of Peace, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, shall bruise Satan underneath your feet, and put that triumphant song into your mouths, “ Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.”

4thly. Remember, that all this sufficient grace is only to be obtained by prayer and supplication : “ For this,” saith God, “ will I be inquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.” Paul, you see, besought the Lord thrice before he received the answer in my text. Prayer keeps the communication open between the head and the members ; it is the messenger that goes from earth to heaven, and returns with all necessary blessings from thence. Beware, then, of neglecting this necessary duty. Pray in faith, pray in the name of Christ, pray without ceasing ; and beg of Christ to teach you to pray aright, that you may ask and receive, and then your joy shall be full.

Now, brethren, I commend you to God, “ and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” And to him who is able to keep us from falling, whose *grace is sufficient* for all his people, at all times, and in all circumstances, to the only wise God and our Saviour, be glory and honour, dominion and power, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XXXVI.

I THESSALONIANS ii. 4.

But as we were allowed of GOD to be put in trust with the Gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but GOD, which trieth our hearts.

WHEN we compare ourselves with the primitive Christians, we are obliged to confess, that, in every respect, we fall greatly short of their attainments. We seem to be creatures of a lower rank, incapable of reaching the same degree of perfection with them: And indeed it is to be suspected, that through a false and vicious modesty, we look upon these ancient worthies as examples which, though we ought to imitate, we can never hope to equal. Hence we rest satisfied with any distant resemblance we can attain, thinking, that if we are not altogether unlike to them, it is all that a modern Christian can expect.

This is a gross and most pernicious mistake. The gate of heaven is no wider now than it was seventeen hundred years ago. The law of God extends as far as it did when the apostles lived; and I know of no indulgence granted to us which did not exist in the earliest times of Christianity. The church of Rome indeed hath taught, that some eminent Christians have done more than was strictly necessary for their own salvation. But no such doctrine is to be found in Scripture: Nay, on the contrary, we are told, that when we have done all, we are still unprofitable servants, and have done no

more than what was our duty to do. To this day, therefore, we are bound to the same strictness and purity, to the same mortification and self-denial, to the same zeal and steadfastness, which distinguished the primitive Christians; and it is impossible to devise any excuse for our degeneracy from their bright example. They were all men of like passions with ourselves: they had the same corrupt nature to strive against, the same temptations to resist, the same enemies to overcome. Their advantages for performing their duty were not greater than ours: on the contrary, besides all that they possessed, we have the benefit of their example and experience. God's hand is not shortened, the blood of Christ hath lost none of its virtue, his intercession is no less prevalent, nor is the power of his Spirit in the least impaired by length of time or constant exercise. "He is the same yesterday, to-day and for ever:" So that we are entirely without excuse, if we do not both aim at, and actually attain the same degrees of holiness and purity with any of those that have gone before us.

Let us then consider all those persons celebrated in Scripture history, as examples which we not only ought to copy after, but may, through God's grace, hope to equal: and, instead of being dazzled with the lustre of their virtues, let us search into the principles which influenced their conduct, that, by cherishing these, we may be animated to go and do as they did.

The Apostle mentions, in the text, one of distinguished efficacy, which I propose to make the subject of this discourse: A supreme desire to please God, who trieth the heart, without regard either to the praise or censure of men. It was this which supported him under the ignominious treatment he met with at Philippi, which he mentions in the second verse of this chapter, and encou-

raged him to persist in preaching that gospel which he had received in trust from God. It was this which rendered the first Christians superior to adversity in all its frightful forms; and it is the same divine principle, which, if once it got the entire possession of our hearts, would be a constant spring of holy obedience, and enable us, by the blessing of God, to follow the cloud of witnesses who have gone before us, through the most rugged paths of virtue, untainted with that meanness and inconstancy of behaviour which are the reproach of so many professing Christians in our days.

I propose, therefore, through divine assistance, *1st*, To open the nature and extent of the divine principle mentioned in my text; *2dly*, To represent the happy effects which would flow from our being animated with this steady and prevailing desire. After which I shall conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

I BEGIN with opening the nature and extent of the divine principle mentioned in the text. And to prevent any mistakes on this head, it may be needful to observe, that our making the approbation of God our principal aim, does not exclude all regard to the opinion or judgment of our fellow-creatures. We are certainly bound by that great law of our religion, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” to make the pleasing of our brethren, by every lawful means, an object of attention, and a subordinate end of our conduct. And as our neighbour is commanded to love us as himself, both reason and religion teach us to render ourselves as amiable to him as we can, that so we may facilitate his performance of that important duty.

Neither, on the other hand, are we wholly to disregard the censures of men, or be altogether unconcerned, when our reputation is blackened by injurious calumnies.

“A good name is better than precious ointment.” It is a special blessing which we are to receive with thankfulness from the hand of God; and it is our duty to preserve it as carefully as we can. Without a good name, no man can be useful in the world. To neglect it therefore, where it does not proceed from a consciousness of guilt, is certainly in most cases a very culpable indifference. Thus far, then, the judgment of men is to be regarded: but then we must please our brethren only so far as it is pleasing to God. In every case we must state the matter thus: Whether it is wiser to obey God or man? to fear those who, after they have killed the body, have no more that they can do? or to fear him who, after he hath killed, can destroy both soul and body in hell? We must not only condemn the favour of men when compared with the approbation of God, but learn to value it among those transitory things which are only desirable as means for attaining a higher end.

In like manner, the displeasure of men, if unjust, must be reckoned among our light afflictions, which are but for a moment. In such circumstances, it must appear a small matter to us to be judged of man’s judgment: “We have one that judgeth us, even God.” That prophecy of our Saviour must be constantly remembered, that the world will hate us; and his example must be ever before our eyes, who condescended to be scorned, and buffeted, and slandered as an impostor and blasphemer; who made himself of no reputation, but endured the cross, and despised the shame, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. In a word, God must be pleased by all means; his approbation is the one thing needful: he is now our Witness, and will ere long be our Judge; and in these two characters we ought constantly to set him before us.

This is the temper which the Apostle expresseth in the text. I proceed now, in the

Second place, to represent the happy effects which would flow from our being animated with this steady and prevailing desire of pleasing God.

And, in the *1st* place, This would make us ready to every good work, by removing all those grounds of hesitation and suspense, whereby double-minded people are perplexed and retarded in their way. A man must be very slow in his motions, when every step is burdened with such questions as these: What will men think or say of me, if I act in this manner? Will it endanger my reputation, or hurt my interest, or prevent my rising in the world? You will easily see that a considerable time must elapse before all these difficult points can be settled. Whereas the man whose single aim is to please God, is at once freed from all these incumbrances. He no sooner discovers the will of God, than he proceeds immediately to action; and whilst the other is bewildered with numberless conjectures, he goes cheerfully forward, leaving all his temporal concerns in the hands of that God by whose law he is governed, and to whose disposal he is entirely resigned. And is not this an unspeakable advantage, towards abounding in the fruits of righteousness? How free is the mind of such a man? how firm are his steps? He walks straight forward, without deviating into by-paths; and whilst his conscience tells him that he is accepted of God, he enjoys a pure and unmixed tranquillity, which the world can neither give nor take away.

A *2d* happy effect that would flow from our being animated with a steady and prevailing desire of pleasing God, would be, that our conduct would thereby become consistent and uniform. God alone is invariable. What

pleased him yesterday, pleaseth him to-day as well; and though his commandments are exceeding broad, yet they perfectly agree among themselves, and make one beautiful and harmonious system. Whereas men not only differ from one another, but at times from themselves also, and require opposite and contradictory things, which makes it absolutely impossible to please any number of them at one time, or even to continue long in the favour of any one of them, without the most disgraceful inconsistencies in our conduct; but he, whose single aim is to please God, in some measure resembles the Father of lights, “with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” “His path is as the morning light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” His character is still brightening; he advanceth from one degree of grace to another; and is every moment drawing nearer to the enjoyment of that God whose approbation he constantly sought.

In the 3^d place, The divine principle mentioned in my text would produce an universal obedience to the laws of God, because they are but various ways of compassing the important end at which it aims.

The man who is truly animated with it, will, like David, have a “respect to all God’s commandments;” and instead of complaining that they are grievous, will rather rejoice at being furnished with such a variety of opportunities for promoting the glory of his heavenly Father. This divine principle will have influence upon him in the most secret retirement, as well as when he acts in the open view of the world. The hypocrite, who courts the approbation of men, may be very exact and punctual in the outward exercises of religion; but he who seeks to please God will not rest in these. He knows that his Father seeth him in secret; he rejoiceth

in the thought of it, and therefore omits no duty that bears the stamp of his authority: Yea, his heart is as much engaged in the severest acts of self-denial, as in those instances of obedience which are accompanied with the most immediate pleasure and advantage. And this leads me to observe, in the

4th place, That a sincere desire of pleasing God would likewise lessen the difficulties of obedience, and support us under all the sufferings to which our duty may at any time expose us. Perhaps our duty may be accompanied with much pain and trouble in the world; perhaps, like Paul, we may be shamefully entreated, and, like the rest of the apostles, looked upon as the filth and offscouring of all things. But still the Christian reasons thus: "What are these things to me? Is it not better to please God, than to indulge this corrupt flesh, or to seek the approbation of man, "whose breath is in his nostrils?" Should I please men, I could not be the servant of Christ. Those hardships and difficulties which I now suffer will soon be at an end; and though my good things are not in this life, yet hereafter I shall be comforted in that state, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest." Was I not forewarned by my blessed Saviour, that the way to his kingdom lay through many tribulations; and shall I now faint because I find it to be so? Where can I enjoy so good an opportunity of showing my regard to my Lord, as by serving him now that I am brought to the test? He is now saying to me, as once he said to Peter, "Lovest thou me more than these?" Awake then, O my soul, and answer with that Apostle, "Thou, Lord, who knowest all things, knowest that I love thee;" and I adore thy goodness in granting me this opportunity of testifying the strength and sincerity of my love, to thy

glory and my unspeakable comfort.' Such will be the sentiments of the man whose single aim is to obtain the approbation of God. He will continue firm and unshaken amidst the greatest sufferings ; whilst the hypocrite, like the base multitude who followed Christ only for the loaves, will be offended, and fall off, when a day of trouble comes. I shall only add, in the

5th and *last* place, 'That this divine principle will make a man easy and satisfied, whatever be his outward condition in the world. He knows that his lot is appointed by God, and his only anxiety is to perform that part which hath been assigned to him ; being fully assured that God, who is no respecter of persons, will graciously accept his sincere endeavours to please him, whether his station be high or low, whether his circumstances be rich or poor. His only concern is, that Christ may be magnified in his body. Like a determined traveller, he takes the road as he finds it, and makes no complaints, provided it lead him to the end of his journey.

These are some of the advantages which would flow from a sincere and steady desire of pleasing God, and him only. But to set these advances in a more striking light, let us a little examine the opposite principle, and take a view of the man whose great aim is to obtain the approbation of his fellow-creatures. Consider, then,

1st. To what a drudgery he subjects himself, and what a strange and inconsistent part he must act. He makes himself the servant of every man, whose censure he fears, or whose praise he covets. He renounceth his own will and reason : and to whom ? Not to God, who requires nothing but what is holy, just, and good ; but to creatures like himself, ignorant, perverse, and capricious. He who is resolved to please men, must follow them through all their jarring inconsistent humours. He

must undo to-morrow what he does to-day; he must assume a different appearance in every company; he must be the servant of servants, contemptible in the sight of God, and often despised by those very men whose approbation he courts. For it is to be observed, that respect and esteem are sooner found by an honest indifference about them, than by an anxious pursuit of them. They who are satisfied with the approbation of their heavenly Father, who seeth them in secret, are for the most part rewarded by him openly, according to what the wise man saith, “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” Whereas it holds almost universally true, that men lose respect in proportion as they are observed to court it with anxiety, and sink thereby into greater contempt than otherwise they would have done. But,

2dly. Let us suppose that they obtain what they covet so earnestly. How trivial is the acquisition! “Verily,” saith our Lord concerning men-pleasers, “they have their reward,” Ah! poor reward! to obtain the favour and friendship of dying men, instead of the approbation of God, and the testimony of a good conscience; to remember, in hell, that they were well spoken of on earth, and that the sentence of their Judge was the first thing that undeceived their fellow-creatures as to their true character. This is the whole amount of their gain, even supposing that they succeed in their pursuit. But I must now add, in the

3d place, That this is only a supposition; for so great is the difficulty of pleasing men, that, after all your pains, it is ten thousand to one but you shall fail in the attempt. The very number of those whom you would please, renders it almost impossible to succeed in it.

We cannot at one time observe all who observe us,

and expect to be pleased by us. We are like a person who has but a few pieces of money in his pocket, and a crowd of beggars about him. If, according to his best judgment, he divides the whole among the most needy, that he may please God, he is sure of attaining his end ; but if he attempts to manage so as to please them, he will be miserably disappointed. For though the few that shared of his bounty may possibly be satisfied with their proportion ; yet the rest, who got nothing, will revile, and perhaps curse him as penurious and unmerciful. Besides, the different parties and interfering interests of men, make it impossible to please all. If, in any case, you join with one party, the other, of course, will be offended ; if you keep yourself disengaged from either side, you will probably incur the resentment of both ; or, if you think to keep the good-will of both by trimming, making each believe that you are on their side, besides the baseness of the practice, which must set a man at irreconcilable variance with himself, you must live in a perpetual fear of discovery ; and when you are detected, both will hate you worse than they do each other. Nay, in the

4th place, Should you give up the idea of obtaining universal favour, and content yourselves with pleasing a few ; yet such is the mutability of men's tempers, that your success, even in this limited attempt, is very precarious. For how variable is the mind of man ? ever shifting about, and alternately pleased and displeased with the same thing. When you have spent the best of your days in building upon this sand, one blast shall throw down the laborious fabric in a moment. For difficult as it is to gain the favour of men, it is still more difficult to preserve it, or to regain it when it is lost. Serve them as submissively as you can, yet some cross

accident, some failure in gratifying their unreasonable expectations, may suddenly turn all your honours into disgrace, and leave you to complain, as cardinal Wolsey did, ‘ Had I served God as faithfully as man, he would not thus have forsaken me in my old age.’ Nay, the perverseness of many is so great, that they require contradictions ere they will be pleased. If John come fasting, they say, “ he hath a devil :” If Christ come eating and drinking, they say, “ Behold a man gluttonous and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” If your judgment and practice be accommodated to your superiors, some will call you supple and temporising: if it be otherwise, you will perhaps be reproached as discontented and seditious.

Thus, you see, that it is impossible to please all men, or even any considerable number of them at one time. Nor have we cause to wonder at this, when we consider, that our blessed Saviour himself, notwithstanding his perfect innocence and wisdom, was more reviled than any man. Can you do more to deserve the favour of men than Christ did? or can you expect to please those who are displeased with God himself? For is not God daily displeasing men in the course of his Providence? and what is there that they quarrel with more bitterly than with his word? In fine, how can we expect to please any number of our fellow-creatures when we cannot even please ourselves constantly? And for the truth of this, I appeal to your own experience. You must be singular indeed, if you never fall out with yourselves; I mean singularly inattentive (to give it no harsher name) for with the best I am sure there is too often just cause for it. If then we are not able to preserve our own esteem at all times, how can we expect to preserve the approbation of other men?

And now what is your judgment upon the whole? Is not man-pleasing both a mean and fruitless attempt? Is it wise to have for your aim a thing so disquieting, and so very precarious? Is it not by far the wiser course to seek the approbation of God, who trieth your hearts, whom you please most effectually when you pursue your own best interest? He is not variable in his affections, like men. Whom he loves, he loves unto the end. "Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from his love, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Let me then address you in the words of this same Apostle on another occasion, "Ye are bought with a price, be not ye the servants of men." Remember what our Lord said to his disciples while he was on earth; "One is your Master, even Christ." To him you owe all your homage; him only you are bound to please. And is not his favour a sufficient portion? Did he suffer, and bleed, and die, that your hearts might be his, and will you refuse him that which he hath so dearly bought? Where can you find a better Master, or one that you can be so certain of pleasing, if you apply yourselves to it? He requires no contradictory or impracticable services. He hath left you in no uncertainty about your duty. You need not say, "Wherewith shall we come before the Lord? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good, and what he requires of you," even in his written word, which he hath given to be "a lamp to your feet and a light unto your paths." He makes also the most gracious allowances for your infirmities. The willing mind is accepted by him; and although through weakness you fall short of your own good purposes, yet he will say

to you as he did to David, when he purposed to build him an house, “It was well that it was in thine heart.”

Who then would not apply himself to gain the approbation of such a master? This aim, well established, would be a constant principle of holy obedience, and make us to abound in all those fruits of righteousness, which are through Christ to the praise and glory of God. Let this henceforth then be our sole ambition, to approve ourselves to him, by whose sentence our final condition must be determined. And let it be our constant request at the throne of grace, that God by his almighty Spirit may exalt our souls above every mean and sordid view, and enable us always so to speak and act, “not as pleasing men, but God who trieth our hearts.” —Then the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus; and amidst all the changing scenes of life, we shall have this for our rejoicing, even the testimony of a good conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world. *Amen.*

SERMON XXXVII.

ACTS xi. 23.

—*And exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the LORD.*

IT is not easy to conceive a more complete or amiable character than that which is given of Barnabas in the following verse: “He was a good man, and full of the

Holy Ghost, and of faith.” And as a good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth good things; so this faithful minister of Christ, who had been sent by the church in Jerusalem to visit the new converts at Antioch, having seen those real effects of the grace of God among them, of which he had formerly heard the agreeable report, was filled with joy; and, like a true “son of consolation,” which his name signifies, he “exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”—My design in discoursing from these words is,

1st. To explain the exhortation contained in them; *2dly.* To enforce it by some motives and arguments; and, *3dly.* To offer some directions which, through the blessing of God, may be useful to those who are desirous of complying with it.

I BEGIN with explaining the exhortation contained in the text. And,

1st. It is obvious, that it supposeth those to whom it is directed to be already entered upon a religious course of life. Barnabas addressed his discourse to persons who were real converts to Christianity. It appears from the 21st and 22d verses, that the tidings which had come to Jerusalem concerning them, expressly affirmed, that “a great number had believed and turned unto the Lord:” and Barnabas, soon after his arrival at Antioch, received full conviction that this report was true; for “he saw the grace of God, and was glad.” The form of his exhortation indeed sufficiently distinguisheth the character of those to whom it was addressed; for such as had never been joined to the Lord could not, with any propriety, be exhorted to cleave or to adhere to him. And as this exhortation, when addressed to us, supposeth that we have already chosen the ways of God; so it implies

also, that our choice is the fruit of mature and solid consideration. “This purpose of heart,” with which we are to “cleave unto the Lord,” is not a blind and obstinate bigotry, which pusheth men headlong in a way which they know not. Persons of this character may have a fair show in the time of prosperity; but when they are brought to the trial of adversity, they will relinquish against reason what they began without it; and will turn as violent in opposing religion, as ever they seemed zealous in promoting it. In the

2d place, The exhortation in my text requires the habitual exercise of all the graces of the Christian life; the constant performance of every commanded duty. It is not enough that we draw near to the Lord on some stated occasions, or have some transient flashes of devotion, like the Israelites of old, concerning whom it is said (Hosea vi. 4.) that their goodness, like “the morning cloud and early dew,” appeared for a little, and then “vanished” away. We must cleave to the Lord at all times; devotion must be the prevailing temper of our minds; and our habitual practice must correspond to it. It must be our fixed design, and sincere resolution, to keep all God’s commandments, at all times, and in all places and circumstances.

Some there are who lay down resolutions for the performance of *certain* duties, with a designed exception of others: Or perhaps they purpose to perform all the branches of duty for a particular season, with a secret reserve, that when that time shall be elapsed, they will then return to their former course of life. But all such resolutions are an abomination to God, as being hypocritical and insincere; and plainly show that the first step in religion is not yet taken. For at the least, it is essential to the character of a true Christian, that there

be a fixed and peremptory design to adhere to all duty at all times. Grievous failures and sins there may be, even where there are such honest and upright purposes; but if these are wanting, our profession of religion must be altogether vain. In the

3d place, The exhortation in my text requires that we make an open and honest profession of our adherence to the Lord. And I mention this, not only because of the importance of the thing itself, but also on account of the shameful and pernicious failure even of some good people in this matter. Instead of confessing Christ boldly before men, they take as wide steps as their consciences will allow them, to speak the language, and to act the manners, of a corrupt generation, from the dread of appearing singular, or of incurring the charge of ostentation or hypocrisy. But this method of concealing, or rather indeed of giving away, a part of our religion, to secure the reputation of the rest, is neither honest nor wise. Honest it cannot be; for it is just as fraudulent to impose upon men, by seeming worse than we are, as by seeming better: and surely it is not wise; for if we resolve to have the appearance of no more religion than corrupt minds will allow to be sincere, I am afraid we must give it up altogether, and preserve the opinion of our honesty, by appearing to have no religion at all. Hypocrisy is a bad thing, not because it wears the form of religion, but because it wants the power of it; and the way to avoid hypocrisy, is not by doing less than the hypocrite, but by doing more and better. Our Saviour, who spent whole nights in prayer, cannot be supposed to condemn the Pharisees for praying long; but for making their prayers a cloak to cover their covetousness and oppression. He does not find fault with them for their outward beauty, but for their inward pollution and de-

formity. If holiness be really within us, we have no occasion to dread any harm from its appearing outwardly. It will at length overcome the malice of the world, and prove its divine original, both by its native lustre, and its powerful influence, upon those who behold it. Once more, in the

4th place, The exhortation in my text requires, that we persevere in our adherence to the Lord to the end of our lives. It is not sufficient that we begin well, and continue faithful for a while; we must hold on our way, and wax stronger and stronger as we proceed. We must not be wearied with the length of the way, but, “lifting up the hands that hang down, and strengthening the feeble knees,” we must run without wearying, and walk without fainting, “pressing towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” We must not give up religious exercises, either because of the frequent repetition of self-denying duties, or of the bodily decay which old age brings on, or of the increasing infirmities of the mind. We must not give over our work in despondency, because of the slowness of our progress, the smallness of our success, or the number and strength of our enemies. For all these discouragements will soon be over, “and in due time we shall reap, if we faint not, a glorious and everlasting reward.” Having thus explained the exhortation in my text, I proceed now, in the

Second place, To enforce it by some motives and arguments. Consider then,

1st. That the same reasons which at first determined you to choose the ways of God, are equally forcible for inciting you to persevere in them to the end. Upon what grounds did ye embrace your religion at first? Why was it that ye ratified, when ye came to years, that pro-

fession into which ye were baptized? Was it because of the divine authority upon which your religion rests? This reason surely still holds to make you adhere to it amidst the strongest temptations; for divine authority is always to be obeyed, whatever difficulties lie in the way; nay, though the commands of the highest powers on earth should interfere with it. Was it concern for your eternal salvation, and a conviction that “there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby you can be saved, but the name of Christ?” and does not this reason bind you as much to cleave to the Lord as to come to him at first? “The Lord is with you while ye be with him; and if ye seek him he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.” He that endureth to the end,” saith Christ, “shall be saved.” “But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” Nay, the case of apostates is represented every where in Scripture as inconceivably more dreadful than that of any other sinners. Once more, did you enter upon a religious course of life, because your consciences would not suffer you to be at peace till you had done so? This reason also binds you to persevere as you have begun; for the more faithfully you cleave to the Lord, the more steadfastly you resist temptation, the greater peace and tranquillity you will have in your own minds. Nay, the obstacles which now make your progress difficult and painful, will gradually disappear, and at length you shall find, that “Wisdom’s ways are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace.” In a word, whatever good reason we had to set out in the Christian course, the same reason will hold for our perseverance in it. If we began it from bad or from worldly motives, our religion is but an empty profession, without any reality. In this case we are not

yet Christians; and therefore the exhortation in the text doth not belong to us. Consider, in the

2d place, That all the bribes which can be offered, in order to seduce you from your adherence to the Lord, are vain, precarious, and unsatisfying. How often have men “made shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience,” for a mere shadow of expectation, which was never realized to them? But though you should obtain all that this world can present to you, yet how bitter is that advantage which is purchased at the expense of inward peace and tranquillity? Nay, how vain and precarious are the enjoyments of this world at the best? “Riches often make to themselves wings and flee away;” and then they leave the person much more unhappy than they found him, under the dominion of inflamed appetites, without the proper objects to satisfy them. The joy of the wicked is like the “crackling of thorns under a pot;” vain whilst it lasts, and soon at an end. Balaam loved the reward of unrighteousness, and he obtained it; but what did he reap from it at last? he returned to his own country loaded with riches, but all his enjoyments were embittered by “an evil conscience,” and he himself was soon after brought to an untimely end by the victorious arms of the Israelites. So deceitful are the offers with which this world would seduce you from your adherence to the Lord. But in cleaving to the Lord, you can never be disappointed in your expectations; for he hath said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” Consider, in the

3d place, What obligations you lie under to this Lord to whom you are exhorted in the text to “cleave with purpose of heart.” He it was that befriended you in your greatest necessity, and that brought salvation with his own arm, when there was no other eye to pity you, nor any

other hand that could help you. Think on the greatness of the love of Christ, and on the costly proofs he gave of it, in condescending to become a man, and “a man of sorrows,” and at last to die under the bitterest agonies, for the redemption of your souls; and then let gratitude suggest to you what returns may reasonably be expected from creatures so infinitely indebted to him as you have been. Did the Lord Jesus, without any importunity from us, and even contrary to our desires, persist in his gracious design of saving us, till he could say upon the cross, “It is finished?” and shall not we persevere with steadfastness in our duty and allegiance to him? Surely, if his heart clave to us, when we had nothing to merit or invite his love, much more should our hearts cleave to Him, who is not only infinitely amiable in himself, but, which is still more interesting, infinitely kind and gracious to us. Once more, in the

4th place, Consider that this duty, although difficult, is by no means impracticable. Thousands of our brethren, all men of like passions with ourselves, have persevered to the end in cleaving to the Lord, and are now enjoying the glorious reward of their steadfast adherence to him. All necessary aid is provided for you, and ready to be conveyed to you as often as you shall ask it. For “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able to bear, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” Indeed, had you no other strength but your own, to exhort you to “cleave unto the Lord,” would only be to mock your misery. But help is laid for you on One who is mighty, and is no less willing than powerful, to support you under all your trials. He can perfect strength in your weakness; and whilst you are stretching forth your feeble arms to embrace him, he

will inclose you in the arms of his Omnipotence, and work in you effectually “both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Having thus explained the exhortation in the text, and endeavoured to enforce it by some motives and arguments, I proceed now, as was proposed, in the

Third place, To offer some directions, which, through the blessing of God, may be useful to those who are desirous of complying with this exhortation. And, in the

1st place, Labour to have your minds as richly furnished as possible with true Christian knowledge. Study the nature and the reasons of the religion which you profess, that you may be able to confute gainsayers, or at least to withstand their attempts to seduce and pervert you. Knowledge must lie at the root of our steadfastness; otherwise, let the cause in which we are engaged be ever so good, our adherence to it is nothing else than obstinacy of temper; which can neither please God, nor bring any real advantage to ourselves. In such a case, if a man is in the right, it is merely by accident: he might as readily have been in the wrong; and it is very possible, nay extremely likely, that some new “wind of doctrine” may seduce him, and that he may become as violent in his enmity to the gospel as he was once warm in supporting it. It is true, indeed, there may be a great deal of sound knowledge in the head, where there is no real grace in the heart. A foreigner may learn to speak the language of Zion so well, that it will be difficult to distinguish him from one who is “an Isrealite indeed.” But, on the other hand, it is absolutely certain, that grace cannot consist with gross ignorance: For the first operation of the Spirit of God is to open men’s eyes, and to turn them from darkness unto light: Consequently, where there is no light, it must be concluded that there

is no grace. Some exceptions there may be; and there have been examples of persons, in whose temper and practice the lineaments of the New Creature could plainly be discerned, who, by reason of their natural dulness, were incapable of acquiring any distinct knowledge of the principles of religion, or at least of expressing what they knew to the satisfaction of others. This rule of judging must not therefore be extended to those whose understandings are visibly weak, and unapt to receive or to retain instruction; for out of the mouths of such babes and sucklings, God may, and often doth, perfect his praise. But when men are quick enough to learn other things, and yet remain ignorant of the great truths of Christianity; when they discover no anxiety, nor use any proper endeavours, to acquire the knowledge of them; this voluntary ignorance, whatever they may pretend, is a plain proof of an unconverted state. Let none who acknowledge and lament their ignorance, and who use the means to have it removed, be discouraged at what I have now said; for they are not the persons concerning whom I speak. But if I could meditate a reproof of more than ordinary sharpness, I would address it to those who, amidst Bibles and Sermons, and other excellent helps for their spiritual improvement, remain stupidly ignorant of the most essential points of Christianity, without any shame and concern. And, alas! what numbers of this description are to be found among us? How many claim the peculiar privileges of Christians, who know little more of Christianity than the name? Nay, is it not to be feared, that many who partake of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper are so grossly ignorant of the nature of that ordinance, that, with respect to them, the communion-table itself may bear the same inscription which Paul found upon the altar at

Athens, "To the unknown God." This, my brethren, yields us a very melancholy prospect: for surely they are not likely to prove steadfast Christians, who know so little of Christianity, that it is hard to find out upon what grounds they are Christians at all. I would therefore recommend it to you, with the greatest earnestness, to study the principles of that religion which you profess. Spare no pains that may be necessary to get a thorough acquaintance with them, and then you will be in less danger of forsaking them when an hour of trial comes. "They that know their God," said the angel to Daniel, "shall be strong and do exploits." "For understanding shall keep thee," saith Solomon, "to deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh froward things, who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in ways of darkness." But,

2dly. Besides the speculative knowledge of divine truths, you must also labour to acquire an inward experience and relish of them. Did we truly feel their influence upon our own hearts, it would serve in place of a thousand arguments to prove their divine original. He would be a cunning sophister, indeed, who could persuade a man that honey was bitter, whilst he tasted the sweetness of it in his mouth. It is an experimental conviction of the truth of the gospel, which fortifies the true Christian against all the arts of seducers. He hath a witness within himself, and can bring a proof from his own heart, both of the truth and excellence of the religion which he professeth. It was a stubborn question which Athanasius put to the heathens of his time, who denied the resurrection of Christ. "If Christ be not alive," said he, "how doth he yet destroy your idols, and cast out devils, and convert and subdue the world to himself? Are these the works of a dead man?" In like manner

can the sanctified soul say, “Have I felt Christ opening my blind eyes, binding the strong man, and casting him out? Have I felt him stamping his image upon my soul, and bringing me with boldness into the presence of that God whom I had offended? And after this, shall I doubt whether there be a Christ, or whether this Christ be able to save me?” Thus can the true believer, who hath felt the power of Christianity, bring unanswerable arguments for its truth from his own experience: Arguments which neither the temptations of Satan, nor the cavils of wicked men, will be able to overthrow.

3dly. If you would cleave with steadfastness unto the Lord attend constantly to the inward frame and temper of your hearts. Make conscience of watching over your most secret thoughts. Suffer them not to wander without controul, or to spend their strength upon things which cannot profit you; otherwise you will open a wide door to the enemy, and even furnish him with weapons which he will not fail to improve against you. I am afraid the importance of this direction is too little considered by the generality of Christians. We commonly think ourselves secure when out of the way of external temptations, and suffer our minds to roam at large wherever fancy presents an amusing object. Whereas we ought to consider, that whatever inflames our passions, or gives them an improper direction, is equally hurtful to the soul, whether the cause be real or imaginary. Nay, I am persuaded, that the temper doth often make greater havock in our hearts, by mingling his poison with the suggestions of our own minds, than by all the other methods of temptation. If we would keep our hearts indeed, we must watch their motions as carefully when we are alone, as when we are abroad, and in the midst of danger. The presence of God should constantly overawe

our most secret thoughts, and have equal influence on us in our retirement, as when we act in the open view of the world.—A

4th direction I shall give you in the words of the apostle Paul, (Romans xi. 20.) “Be not high minded, but fear.” Remember what our blessed Lord said to his disciples, “Without me ye can do nothing.” Nothing is more offensive to God than pride. When our hearts begin to swell with an high opinion of our own strength, he is provoked to withhold his grace from us; because all that is poured into the proud soul runs over in self-applause, and so is like water spilt on a rock, with respect to any good that it doth to a man himself, or any glory which it brings to God. The proud heart, like the towering cliff, is never fruitful. If we would in due time be exalted, we must first humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. This is the way to obtain fresh supplies of his supporting grace. “Happy is the man,” saith Solomon, “who feareth always.” A holy diffidence of ourselves is the true temper of a Christian, and will both serve to keep us out of the way of temptation, and teach us to act with the caution of men who perceive their danger, and are careful to shun it.

5thly. Avoid, as much as possible, the fellowship of wicked men. This is an advice which I am inclined to repeat as often as I can find occasion for it; and indeed it is scarcely possible to insist upon it as much as its importance deserves. A man who is careless of his company, disregards his own soul. If therefore you would cleave unto the Lord, imitate the holy Psalmist, and give charge to evil-doers to depart from you. Let the saints, the excellent ones of the earth, be the men of your counsel. We stand much in need of all the assistance which we can derive from our fellow Christians:

“Wo to him that is alone when he falleth,” saith the wise man, “for he hath not another to help him up.” Whereas, when Christians join together in holy communion, like trees planted in a thicket, they shelter and defend one another. They have boldness to face their adversaries, as well as strength to baffle their attempts to seduce them. “Let us then exhort one another daily, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Like brethren, let us dwell together in love and unity, having all our spiritual goods in common, being “ready to distribute, willing to communicate,” according to the measure of gifts and graces which it hath pleased our heavenly Father to bestow on us.—In the

6th and last place, If we would obey the exhortation in the text, we must beware of neglecting the instrumental duties of religion. Let us carefully read the Holy Scriptures, which God, in mercy, hath given us to be a “lamp to our feet, and a light unto our path.”—“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” To reading you must join the hearing of the word preached; that powerful ordinance which God hath so remarkably countenanced in all ages of the church, and made effectual, by his blessing, both for the conversion of sinners, and for the establishment of his own people. Under this head I would particularly recommend to you a devout attendance upon the holy sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, which is so peculiarly calculated to strengthen our faith, and to build us up in holiness and comfort, unto eternal life. This hath been found, in the experience of all the saints, to be a most blessed institution, which hath in every age enabled men to hold on their way with alacrity and joy, and in every situation hath assisted them to renew their strength. To all this

we must add constant and fervent prayer to God. By this we maintain correspondence with the “Father of lights, from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift.” Prayer is the messenger which he hath appointed for conveying to us help in every time of need. He hath promised his Spirit to them who ask it. Let us “ask and receive, that our joy may be full.”

Thus, my brethren, I have suggested to you a few plain directions, which, through the blessing of God, may be of use to assist you in maintaining that firm adherence to the Lord which my text recommends. All that now remains is, that I intreat you to reduce them to practice. And what motive can I represent to you so powerful as the consideration, that “to them who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life.”—“To him that overcometh,” saith Christ, “will I grant to sit down with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.” The time draweth near, when you shall be placed beyond the reach of temptation, when your warfare shall be accomplished, and your struggles at an end; and who would not sustain a short, though it were a sharp conflict, that he might obtain a triumphant victory? Some of us perhaps have but a few more efforts to make, and a few more assaults to sustain, before Christ shall call us home to receive the enriching reward—a reward not of debt but of grace; even that exceeding and eternal weight of glory, with which our light and momentary afflictions are not worthy to be compared. Let us all then be persuaded, “with purpose of heart to cleave unto the Lord.” Let us count all things but loss, that we may win Christ, and be found in him, not having our own righteousness, but that everlasting righteousness

which he hath prepared for them who “cleave to him.” Let us go from this place, saying as Peter did, only with more humility, “Though all men should forsake thee, yet will not we.” And “now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy: To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.” *Amen.*

SERMON XXXVIII.

MICAH vi. 3.

O my People, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against ME.

IT is impossible to predict what impression the same truth will make upon the different minds of men. That word, which will pierce one man to the “dividing asunder of the soul and spirit,” may have no edge at all when addressed to another. But were I to judge from my own feelings, I should think, that all the terrors of God could not more effectually awe the heart of a sinner, than the passage of Scripture which I have now read. It strikes my ear like the last sound of God’s mercy. Doth the Almighty command and threaten? I fear and tremble: yet I have still some expectation that his compassion may interpose in my behalf.—But doth he put off his terrible Majesty, and, instead of vindicating the authority, condescend to plead the reasonableness of his law? then I am sure that his forbearance is almost ex-

hausted, and that my day of grace is drawing near to an end. For as he neither wants power to punish, nor provocation to justify the punishment he might inflict, his design in stooping so low, can only be to render my condemnation consistent with the utmost extent of his mercy. In the words of the text, the Supreme Lord of heaven and earth appeals to sinners themselves for the mildness and equity of his government: and challengeth them to produce one instance of undue severity towards them, or the least shadow of excuse for their undutiful behaviour towards him. “O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me.” And doth the infinitely wise God condescend to be tried at the bar of human reason? Can it then be supposed that his cause is doubtful, or that he runs the least hazard of being cast in judgment? Have we not reason to conclude, that the evidence of his goodness must be clear and irresistible, when he offers it to trial before the most partial tribunal, and submits his vindication to those very persons who cannot justify him without condemning themselves?

But as sinners are naturally supposed to shun the light, and to turn away their eyes from every thing that hath a tendency to humble and abase them; it may be of use to bring this cause to a fair and open trial: Which, through divine assistance, I propose to do.

First. By giving you a direct proof of the goodness of God, and of his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures.

Secondly. By examining some of the most plausible objections which are argued against the mildness and equity of the divine administration.

I will then conclude with a divine and practical improvement of the subject.

I BEGIN with giving you a direct proof of the goodness of God, and of his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures. This appears, in the

1st place, From the unwearied patience which he exerciseth towards transgressors. How easily could he arrest them in the midst of their mad career, and hurry them to judgment with all their provocations on their heads? Might not God have seized thee, O sinner, in the very act of sin, with a curse or a lie in thy mouth, and have stopped that breath with which thou wast insulting his name and his laws? How often might he have summoned thee to his deed tribunal in a fit of drunkenness; and made thee sober in that place of torment where there is not a drop of water to cool the thirsty tongue? Ah, how easy a matter is it for the Almighty to bring down the proudest of his foes? to silence the profane, injurious railer? to bind the hands of the oppressors, and to make them know that they are but worms? We read of one angel destroying in one night an hundred and fourscore and five thousand Assyrians; and myriads of angels stand continually before his throne ready to execute whatever he commands. He is the Lord of Hosts, "who doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." How easily can he throw thee into a bed of languishing? and waste thy strength under such a pining sickness, or racking pain, as to make thee cry for mercy to him whom thou blasphemest, and even beg the prayers of those whom thou wast wont to scorn? But God hath as yet done none of these things. By his merciful visitation he preserves thee in the land of the living and in the land of hope. He supplies all thy wants, and loads thee with increasing benefits. He gave thee that breath which thou hast breathed out against him, and

every moment of that time which thou hast squandered away in idleness, sensuality, and the works of the flesh. Why doth he yet wait to be gracious, if he were not tenderly solicitous for thy welfare? Surely his sparing mercy must be intended to bring thee back to himself: He restrains his wrath, that his goodness, like coals of fire, may melt down thine impenitence, and thy hardness of heart: “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, (as some men count slackness) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

2dly. The goodness of God, and his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures, is still more illustriously displayed in the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom God sent into the world for this very end, “that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life.” There we see a proof, the most strong and convincing that God himself could give, of his having “no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his way and live.” Would he have ransomed sinners at so costly a price as the blood of his only begotten Son? would he have astonished angels with so wonderful an act of condescension, as to send Him who was the “brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person,” to assume the likeness of sinful flesh, to submit to the infirmities of our low nature, nay, to the ignominy and pain of the cross? had not our everlasting welfare been an object of his tenderest concern. This surely, if duly considered, must remove all suspicions of his goodness, and destroy the jealousies even of the most distrustful mind. Behold Christ weeping over the impending fate of Jerusalem, and bemoaning the hardness of heart of those who attended his ministry; view him in his agony, and in his

conflict with the powers of darkness; hear him on the cross praying for his enemies; and then suppose, if you are able, that your ruin can be pleasing to him who hath done so much to prevent it. But, in the

3d place, The various means which God employs for reclaiming men from their ways of folly and vice, afford another proof of his goodness, and of his tender concern for their welfare. He is not only the Author of the gracious plan of our redemption, but he hath likewise set before us the most powerful motives to persuade us to embrace his offered favour, and to comply with his designs of mercy. Every consideration which can be supposed to work, either on our hopes or our fears, is set before us in the most striking light. The veil is removed from the invisible world; the joys of glorified saints, and the torments of despairing sinners, are made the subject of a clear revelation. How affectionately doth he invite men to turn unto him and live? “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live.” Even the threatenings of God are not so much the thunderings of his justice, as the loud rhetoric of his mercy. He shakes the rod over us, that, by a timely submission, we may avert the stroke. And when all the methods used to reclaim a sinner have proved ineffectual, with what reluctance doth he at last execute his threatened vengeance? “How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as

Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Nay, after the fierceness of his anger hath consumed the transgressors, what regret doth he express that they should have extorted from him their own punishment? "O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!" He utters these words as it were with a sigh, lamenting the folly and perverseness which had compelled him to such measures of severity against them: Not that God is influenced by any human passions; but because he could not otherwise communicate, in a manner intelligible to us, the deep concern which he takes in our welfare.

Nor are these mere expressions of kindness, which are unaccompanied with deeds to prove their sincerity, and to render them effectual: he hath instituted an order of men to carry the glad tidings of salvation to every corner of the earth; to beseech sinners, in his name, to lay aside their enmity to him, which can only hurt themselves, and to return to that Almighty Being, who, though he stands in no need of them, is most sincerely willing to receive them into his favour, and to bestow on them everlasting happiness. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." We are commanded to "preach the word, to be instant in season and out of season, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." And to excite us to be diligent and faithful in the exercise of this office, he hath assured us, "that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, we shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

Is not this then an unanswerable proof that God hath

no pleasure in the death of sinners? What stronger evidence of it could he give, than to send to them so many messengers, to beseech them in his name to turn and live? to employ on this kind errand creatures of the same nature with themselves, subject to the same passions, exposed to the same temptations, who have the advantage of familiar intercourse with them, and who are always at hand, to help, to comfort, and to quicken them? Nay, he hath made it the duty of every man, in his place, to do all that he can for the conversion of others. "Exhort one another daily," saith an apostle, "while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." "Brethren," saith the apostle James, "if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know, that he which converteth a sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Nor shall this labour of love pass without a reward; for "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." But that nothing may be wanting to beget in us the firmest persuasion of the goodness of God, and of his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures, let it be observed, in the

4th and *last* place on this head, That he hath selected some of the most notorious offenders in the different ages of the world to be monuments of the riches of his grace, that the chief of sinners might be encouraged to apply to him for pardon and eternal life; who, without such examples, might have been ready to look on their case as desperate. How many, who were once sunk into the lowest degeneracy, are now in heaven, singing that grateful, triumphant song, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath

made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." There is Manasseh, one who used enchantment and divination, and who deluged the streets of Jerusalem with innocent blood. There is Saul, once a blasphemer and a persecutor, who thus testifies of himself, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." There are some of those Corinthians who were once the scandal of their country, and the reproach of human nature, (1 Cor. vi. 11.) but being "washed, and sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God," are now walking in white, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth, and contemplating with wonder and joy the extent of that love "which passeth knowledge." Nay, there are some of the murderers of the Lord of glory, three thousand of whom were converted by the ministry of Peter in one day: and now they are rejoicing in the presence of that Jesus whom they crucified, and ascribing their eternal salvation to that blood which was shed by their own wicked hands. In one word, with such examples as these the Scripture is replenished; and God every where appears, like the father in the parable, stretching forth his arms to the prodigal son, and delighting to display the riches of his grace.

Such then are the positive and direct evidences of the goodness of God, and of his tender concern for the welfare of his creatures. I proceed now, as was proposed, in the

Second place, To examine some of the most plausible objections which are urged against the mildness and equity of the divine administration.

Say, then, O sinner, wherein hath God dealt rigorously with you? and what cause he hath ever given you to charge him with severity? “Testify against him,” in what respect he hath shewn himself an enemy to your happiness?

1st. Is it the holiness and perfection of his law that you complain of? Hath he given you too accurate a rule of life? and laid too many restraints upon your natural inclinations? This complaint is both foolish and ungrateful. The law of God requires nothing but what tends to make us happy; nor doth it forbid any thing which would not be productive of our misery. The very design of it is to describe and recommend that holiness, “without which no man shall see the Lord:” so that the perfection of it is no less a proof of the goodness than of the wisdom of its Author. Were holiness indeed unnecessary, or were vice the road to happiness, the objection would in that case be just. But as there is an inseparable connexion between sin and misery; and as holiness is indispensably necessary to qualify us for the enjoyment of God; it must follow, that to find fault with the purity of his law, is to find fault with it for being too much adapted to our interest. It is not therefore less absurd, than if a scholar were to blame his master for the excellence of the example which he had given him to copy; or, than if a traveller should quarrel with his guide, for directing him with too much exactness in the way.

2dly. Do you complain of the threatenings with which this law is enforced? Doth God appear severe, because he hath said, that the wicked must either turn from his evil ways or die? This complaint is surely as unreasonable as the former. Shall God be reckoned an enemy to your happiness, because he useth the most effectual means to promote it? Can he be supposed to de-

sire your misery, who so earnestly warns you of your danger, and who so warmly pleads with you to avoid it! Should one find you running towards a precipice in your sleep, would you blame him for stopping you, though perhaps he might interrupt you in the enjoyment of some pleasant dream? Were you ready to sink in deep water, would you not reckon that man your friend who should save you from drowning, even though he dragged you out by the hair of the head? This is the very purpose, or the friendly design of all God's threatenings. He publisheth them, that they may never be executed; he makes them terrible, that the terror of them may persuade men to avoid them. Had God published a law and concealed the importance of it, with respect to our happiness or misery; would not the objection, in that case, against his goodness, have been far more just and rational? If his threatenings prevail with you, never shall you have cause to complain of their severity; and if they do not prevail, with what face can you allege, that the penalties are too high, when, at the same time, your own practice confutes you, and proves, that they are not high enough to restrain you from incurring them. But,

3dly. Perhaps your objection doth not lie so much against the publication of the threatenings, as against the final execution of them. You see their use to overawe mankind in this world; but you think that it would be cruel in God to inflict them in good earnest, and to punish men eternally, for sins committed during the short period of their abode on earth. Now, in answer to this, let me only ask you, whether those threatenings would be of any use at all, if the sinner knew that they would never be executed, or even if the execution of them were in the least degree doubtful? He who can

make subjects believe that their governor means only to frighten them with his penalties, will easily make his laws of no effect, and set offenders loose from every restraint. The belief of the execution is therefore absolutely necessary to the efficacy of the law, which otherwise could only be an engine to work upon fools. And if it be necessary in all cases that subjects should believe that the law will be executed, then it follows, in the present case, that the threatenings of God shall certainly be executed at last. For God cannot lie, nor make it the duty of mankind to believe a lie. He has no need of such base means to keep the world in order. If the penalties, as they are described in the law, be consistent with the goodness of God, the inflicting of them at last cannot in reason be sustained as an objection against it. Say then, O sinner, what farther hast thou to allege against God? The appeal is made to you in the text, and a challenge given to you to bring forth all your objections against his laws and government. Do you blame him, in the

4th place, For the temptations you meet with in the world, and those circumstances of danger with which you are surrounded? Let us consider a little the justice of this complaint. The strongest temptations, you must allow, have no compulsive efficacy; all that they can do, is to solicit and entice us: And are there not addressed to us far more weighty arguments and solicitations to forsake sin, and to walk in the paths of wisdom? If we cannot resist the devil and the flesh, how can we refuse what God demands, who pleadeth with us by infinitely stronger motives than they can present to us? for he sets before us the endless joys, or the endless torments, of a future state of existence. Doth not the undefiled inheritance of the saints in light infinitely transcend all that

earth or sense can promise us? and yet, shall we pretend to justify ourselves, when, contrary to all reason, we prefer the pleasures of sin, which are but for a moment, to the eternal happiness and glory of the world to come? Once more, in the

5th place, Do you object, that you cannot reclaim or convert yourselves? that man can do nothing towards his conversion, unless he shall receive power from on high? that therefore you are excusable until God shall impart his assistance? and that if you perish, it is not your fault?

My brethren, we must not speak falsely even for God; nor suppress or disguise the doctrines of his word, however they may be abused by carnal and obstinate sinners.

It is true that man in his natural state cannot do any thing that is spiritually good; for “they that are in the flesh cannot please God.” It is equally true, that God is a debtor to no man, but is the free disposer of his own grace, giving it when and to whomsoever he pleaseth. But it is no less true, that there are certain means of his appointment, in the use of which alone we have reason to expect his aid; and he who doth not improve these faithfully, complains with a very bad grace, at least, and is justly chargeable with his own damnation.

You cannot convert yourselves;—but cannot you forbear to curse and blaspheme the name of God? Cannot you restrain yourselves when your nature is duly refreshed with meat and drink? Cannot you keep at a distance from evil company, and avoid many occasions of sinning, and temptations to sin? It is certainly in your power to perform many of the external acts of religious worship. You can go to church, if you are so disposed, as easily as you can stay at home, or ride about for

amusement. You can go to your closet as easily as to the tavern. What hinders you to read your Bible as well as any other book? to meditate on what it contains, and on its vast importance to your everlasting interest?

Have you then done these things, or have you not done them? Have you avoided the tempting occasions of evil; Have you used the means of grace, and attended seriously upon the ordinances of God's worship? If you have neglected to employ the powers you possess, whom can you blame for it, that you have not obtained more extensive powers? God will make you one day to know, that it was not he who carried you to the haunts of riot, intemperance, and lewdness; that it was not he who tempted you to swear profanely, or to rail at goodness, or to quarrel with the Word that should have saved you; but that all this was owing to the voluntary and obstinate wickedness of your own corrupt hearts. And, whatever excuses sinners may now feign to themselves, they must all stand speechless at last. None shall be able to plead, 'Lord, I applied to thee for converting grace, but it was refused me.' No, God will be clear when he judgeth; and every mouth shall be stopped in that day when he passeth sentence on an assembled world.

Thus have I examined and endeavoured to refute some of the most plausible objections which are commonly alleged against the mildness and equity of the divine administration; and from all that has been said, I hope it now appears, that nothing can be more unreasonable and blasphemous than to lay the blame of the sinner's destruction upon God. "The foolishness of man," saith Solomon, "perverteth his way; and his heart fretteth against the Lord." Prov. xix. 3. This is the true account of the matter. The sinner destroys him-

self by his own wilful and obstinate folly, and then he accuses God, as if he were the cause of his misery ; although God hath done every thing to save him, which could have been done by the righteous Lawgiver and Governor of the world.

The lying lips shall ere long be put to silence. The workers of iniquity shall stand self-condemned before the awful tribunal ; and all their vain and impious pretexts and excuses, instead of availing them in that day, will only serve to increase their shame and confusion. With what inconceivable remorse and anguish will the sinner then review his past conduct ? How contemptible will those temptations then appear to him, which he once magnified so much, when he shall compare them with the powerful motives and encouragements to a holy life, which were in vain so often and so plainly set before him ? when he shall recollect the various means and instruments which were employed to save him from ruin ; the full and free offers which were made to him of pardoning mercy and of sanctifying grace ; the earnest calls and invitations which he received to turn from his evil way and live ? when he shall view that precious fountain, in which thousands, as guilty as himself, have been washed and made clean ; and shall reflect that all these advantages are for ever lost ; how shall he then hang down his head, and smite his guilty and despairing breast ? saying, in the bitterness of his soul, “ How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof ? and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me ? Prov. v. 12, 13. Then shall all his complaints be turned against himself ; and, instead of resting on his wonted excuses, he shall then call, but call in vain, “ on the mountains and on the rocks to fall on him, and to hide him from the face

of him who sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb." O that men were wise, and would consider these things, so as to prevent, by a timely repentance, the horrors of that awful day which is hastening fast to surprise a sleeping world.

My brethren, I have represented your danger to you as plainly as I could. I have endeavoured to expose the weakness of those pitiful evasions by which many of you endeavour to support a vain hope, or at least to lessen the awful apprehensions of a judgment to come. I have spoken to your ears: God alone can speak to your hearts; and to his mercy and grace I commend you.—Allow me, before I conclude, to beg your attention to the following considerations.

Consider, that to be your own destroyers is to counteract the very strongest principle of your natures, the principle of self-preservation. Every creature naturally desireth its own felicity; and will you obstinately rush upon manifest ruin through all the obstacles that are placed in your way? Assistants you may find in accomplishing this desperate purpose; but without your own consent and active concurrence, it never can be accomplished, even though the whole world, and all the host of apostate spirits, were combined against you. Will you be worse than devils to yourselves? What pity can you expect to meet with, who have no pity for your own souls? The unfortunate are objects of compassion; but wilful self-destroyers neither deserve compassion, nor can expect it. Consider what an aggravation this will be of your misery in a future state? How terrible will it be to recollect, in the regions of everlasting woe, that ye have brought all your misery on yourselves? that you were forewarned repeatedly, and awfully forewarned, of the fatal issue of your conduct, but without ef-

fect? that Christ and eternal salvation were freely offered to you, but were contemptuously despised and set at nought? These considerations will add a continual fuel to the tormenting flames, and will make them burn with insufferable violence. O then be wise in time! "Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."—To conclude: Ponder the wholesome advice recorded in (Prov. viii. 33, 36.) "Hear Instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate me, love death." *Amen.*

SERMON XXXIX.

Preached on the Evening of a Communion-Sabbath.

GALATIANS vi. 4.

Let every Man prove his own Work.

BEFORE I enter upon the subject of this text, it may not be improper to mention some of the reasons which have led me to it at this time.

1st. As many, who call themselves Christians, dis-

cover so little of Christianity in their lives, that we are often at a loss to reconcile their conduct with their professions; I thought it might be of use to those who are in any degree distinguished by their religious conduct, if I could lead them into such a scrutiny of themselves as this text suggests to us; or persuade them to inquire, whether their works, which are apparently good, are such as will abide the test: whether they proceed from the Spirit of God, or from the spirit of the world: whether they are animated by a “simplicity and godly sincerity,” or by the unhallowed principles of self-love, and the desire of recommending themselves to the esteem of men.

2dly. It is evident from Scripture, that a man may go far in the outward performance of his duty, and yet be actuated by such motives as afford him greater cause of grief and of shame than of that rejoicing which is mentioned in the clause following my text. I read in the preceding verse, that it is possible for a “man to think himself to be something when he is nothing.” I find in fact that the Laodiceans imagined themselves to be “rich and increased with goods, and having need of nothing,” when, in truth, they were “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” And there are too many reasons to suspect, that, like those, multitudes of this present generation are “pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness;” have a “name that they live” while “they are dead;” and have “the praise of men” while “their hearts are not right with God.”

3dly. I foresee the time when thousands shall wish that they had followed the Apostle’s advice in my text, “Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”—“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archan-

gel, and the trump of God; to judge the world in righteousness. In that day many shall say to him, Lord, Lord, did we not eat and drink in thy presence, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" But when they receive that awful reply, "Depart from me, I know you not whence ye are," with what inconceivable anguish will they then cry out, Oh! that we had tried and proved those specious works in which we trusted. We thought them good and acceptable to God; alas! too late, we find our unhappy mistake. The time was, when this discovery might have profited us; but now the doom is passed; our state is fixed; and nothing remains for us but a fruitless remorse, and the galling remembrance of our former sloth and security.—And,

Lastly. When I considered that I was to speak to communicants, who have this day sealed either their friendship or their enmity with Christ at his own table, it determined me to address to you a pressing and earnest call to prove this part of your work in particular; that such as have been properly employed in this holy service may, after trial of themselves, lay hold of the comforts which belong to them; and that others may receive such a view of their guilt and of their danger, as, by the grace of God, shall constrain them to have immediate recourse to that injured, but compassionate Saviour, whose blood, instead of crying for vengeance, pleads for mercy to the chief of sinners. On all these accounts let me intreat, not only the hearing of your ears, but the attention of your minds, whilst I endeavour, through divine aid,

1st, To explain the full meaning or import of the Apostle's exhortation—"Let every man prove his own work."

2dly. To give you some directions with regard to the

manner of conducting the inquiry to which the exhortation relates; and then to point out to you the practical improvement of the subject. I begin with the exhortation itself, "Let every man prove his own work."

There is a particular emphasis in these words, which must not be overlooked. It is his *own* work that a man must prove. We are sufficiently ready to examine, and to pass sentence upon the works of others. We are often abroad, but are seldom at home, where our chief business lies. Like some travellers, who are well acquainted with foreign countries, but shamefully ignorant of their own, we know more of others than we are willing to know of ourselves, and persuade ourselves, that the study of our own hearts is a dull and melancholy business, which may incite within us many uneasy thoughts, and can give us no pleasure at all.

Alas! how low are we sunk by our apostacy from God! and with what little and false consolations may a degenerate mind be soothed! Instead of looking inwards for positive evidence of our favour with God, we learn to regulate our judgment of ourselves by what we perceive in the characters of other men. If the image of the devil is more visibly formed on others than on ourselves, we have little anxiety to discover the image of God upon our own hearts. The bulk of men think it enough to know that some of their brethren are worse than they are, as if their characters would rise in proportion as the characters of others are debased. We must relinquish this false rule of judging, if we would either enter into the spirit of the exhortation in the text, or would not be fatally disappointed at last. We must learn to rejoice in ourselves and not in others; and we must call in our thoughts from the state of other men, and "prove every man his own work."—"Every man," saith the Apos-

tle, "shall bear his own burden." Each of us shall give an account of his own conduct to God, and shall be judged according to his own personal behaviour, without regard to any comparative goodness or attainments which may belong to him.

But here, perhaps, some may ask the question, To what works do you refer? If they are works of a doubtful nature, we acknowledge that they ought to be tried, and that those are highly to blame who neglect to try them. But are there not other works, so eminently good and excellent in themselves, that the person who doth them may conclude, without hesitation, that they are certainly pleasing and acceptable to God? This, my brethren, is a rock upon which thousands have made shipwreck. It would make one sad to think what multitudes will be surprised with the everlasting burnings, who, in consequence of this very opinion, flatter themselves, while they live, with the hopes of heaven. You must therefore allow me to retort the question, and to ask, What are those works which are so eminently good and excellent, that there is no need to prove them? or rather, Are there any duties of an external nature, which an hypocrite cannot perform as well as you? Do you frequent the church, and attend upon the preaching of the word? So did the impenitent Jews in the days of the prophet Ezekiel, with as much decency, perhaps, and apparent devotion, as are seen in you. For thus said the Lord unto that prophet, "They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." Are you strict observers of the Sabbath? We read of some who persecuted our Saviour for working a miracle of mercy on the sabbath-

day: and surely you pretend not to a greater degree of strictness than this. Do you pray? So did the Pharisees; they made long prayers, and they prayed with a loud voice. Do you fast before the observation of the Lord's Supper? The Pharisees did more: They fasted twice in the week. Do you partake of that holy sacrament? Many think that Judas did so too: we know at least that he was present at the passover, which was also a solemn rite of religion: And therefore no certain conclusion can be drawn from the outward exercises of religious worship.

Where then shall we go next? Will we judge with more certainty from the duties of the second table of the law of God.

Here, my brethren, the matter may be brought to a very short issue. We read of a young man who professed, in the presence of our Lord, that he had kept all these commandments from his youth: and yet we learn from the sequel of his story, that he preferred the possessions of this earth to the enjoyment of God; for he refused to sell his lands for the relief of the poor, although our Saviour had assured him of treasure in heaven. But you have perhaps to say for yourselves, that you are charitable and kind to the poor; and ask if this is not a duty applauded in Scripture? I confess it is much applauded. But were not the proud and hypocritical Pharisees also charitable? They gave alms; and more liberal alms than most of us; otherwise, I suppose, they would have sounded the trumpet as little as we do. We may therefore conclude, that none of all these outward deeds are sufficient, by themselves, to distinguish us from the hypocrite: But the question will return, May we not join all these works together? and in that case, may we not draw from them a certain conclusion?

My brethren, if I were now speaking of the judgment which others ought to form of your characters, from what they see in your actions, I would certainly say, that those favourable appearances ought to persuade them that you are real Christians. But as I speak of the estimate which you are to make of yourselves, I must tell you, that all this fair show may certainly consist with a heart that is not "sound in God's statutes." For Amaziah the king of Judah was not far short of this, of whom we read (2 Chron. xxv. 2.) that he "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord;" but (observe what follows, he did it) "not with a perfect heart." What a promising appearance was here blasted! Amaziah gave God every thing but his heart; the very thing which God valued, and without which all that he could give besides was insignificant. Does not this shake the foundation of your confidence, and make you, like one newly awakened out of a flattering dream, summon up all your attention to see whether you are in the unhappy situation of Amaziah, or are really in the circumstances in which your own fancy hath represented you? This, my brethren, is the very thing which I have been aiming at. I foresee the day, when many who were something in their own eyes, and trusted in themselves that they were righteous, will present their specious roll of outward duties to the heart-searching Judge, saying, Lo! this is the life which we spent in the flesh; who will not be able to add, This life was "by the faith of the Son of God." Methinks I hear the Judge say to them, These are indeed the duties which I enjoined; but where is the spirit which should have animated them? These are the sacrifices which I appointed; but the strange fire with which you offered them can find no acceptance here. Ye have not served me, but yourselves.

“I never knew you.” And therefore ye can receive no reward.

What hath been said may be sufficient to explain the Apostle’s exhortation; and to show both the reasonableness and the necessity of proving even our best works. I proceed now,

Secondly, To give you some directions with regard to the manner of conducting this important inquiry.

Now, before a man can be qualified for proving his own works, two things are indispensably necessary. The

1st is, That he should be well acquainted with the holy Scriptures; for it is by the Scriptures alone that we know with certainty what is good and acceptable to God. “Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?” said David. The answer is, “By taking heed thereto according to thy word.” Scripture is that unerring rule which points out to us the road of duty, and which discovers to us the straightness or the crookedness of our own paths. A considerable degree of acquaintance with it, is therefore absolutely necessary to enable us “to prove” and to judge of our own works. But,

2dly. It is also requisite that we should be constant and diligent observers of what passeth in our own hearts; for “out of the heart are the issues of life.” The heart is the fountain from which all our actions flow, and from which alone they can be truly denominated either good or bad. I observed formerly, that there is no outward duty which a hypocrite may not counterfeit: And we have a remarkable example (2 Kings x.) of the same action being good in one man and bad in another, from the different dispositions with which it was performed. We find two men riding in the same chariot, and both of them engaged in the same expedition, Jehu and Jo-

nadab. But though the work they were executing was the same, the different ends which they aimed at, made that which was an excellent duty in Jonadab an act of mere cruelty, and of vile hypocrisy, in Jehu. Jehu was impelled, not by zeal for the Lord, but by ambition to wear a crown. We must therefore retire into our own breasts, and carefully observe the various operations of our minds. We must consider the motives that influence our conduct; the ends we propose in our actions; and the temper and frame of spirit with which every duty is performed. For in vain do we know the rule, unless we also know the thing to which it must be applied; in vain do we read and study the Scriptures, unless we likewise read and study our own hearts. The duty I am recommending, consists in comparing them together, that we may discover how far they agree, and wherein they differ. This is indeed a work of great difficulty; but, though difficult, it is not impracticable. He who gave the command, will likewise grant his assistance to those who, in a humble dependance on his grace, apply themselves heartily to this necessary duty. Let it then be your

First care, to get your minds thoroughly awakened when you enter upon this work. Never was time put to a higher improvement; never were thoughts spent upon a more important business. Compared with this, the trial of men for their lives at a human bar is a mere trifle; for here nothing less than an eternal interest depends on the issue. Summon up all the powers of your souls, bring your thoughts to the subject as intensely as you can, let your minds be divested of every other care; and above all—O be honest with yourselves, and resolve to pass an impartial sentence, as the evidence shall appear, whether it should be in your favour or against you. Re-

member that your great Judge knows the truth of your condition, and that therefore you can gain nothing by hiding it from yourselves.

When your hearts are once seriously engaged, then fall down before God, and plead the assistance of his good Spirit, to enlighten and direct you in the knowledge of yourselves; to keep you from mistakes, both on the one hand and on the other; and to guide you to a just and an affecting view of your true condition.

Having thus prepared yourselves by meditation and prayer, proceed immediately to the inquiry itself, before your hearts begin to cool, or the impressions of the divine presence are effaced. Set the word of God before you as the rule, and then put the question. Do my actions and dispositions correspond to this rule, or are they inconsistent with it? Take your actions, and the sources of them, one by one, and bring them to this standard; suffer not your hearts, in any case, to start aside, till they have given an explicit answer; lay the command of God upon them, and charge them to obey upon pain of his wrath.

When, by these means, you have discovered the truth, then pass the sentence on yourselves, and labour to have your hearts properly affected with it. Do not think it enough to have discerned your true condition, but endeavour to feel what God hath made you to know. If you find that you have been all along formal and hypocritical in your obedience; that instead of serving God, you have been serving yourselves; that instead of seeking his approbation, you have been courting the applause of men; that instead of sowing to the Spirit, you have been sowing to the flesh;—O lay this conviction home to your hearts. Think what a dreadful state you are in; unpardoned, unsanctified, and, if death should now surprise you, ruined for ever.

But, whilst you thus endeavour to know the very worst of your condition, beware, at the same time, of giving way to gloomy and desponding thoughts. Let none of you say, “Because I am ungodly, I shall die so; because I am an hypocrite, I shall continue so;” for such despondence is no less unwarranted than your former presumption. You have another work to do, which is to flee speedily to Christ, and to break off your hypocrisy and wickedness by repentance. If you find that you have been hitherto out of the way, do not sit down and despair, but make the more haste to turn into it. Christ is still in your offer, and you cannot be more willing to receive him than he is to accept of you.

But, on the other hand, if you find reason to conclude, after a strict and impartial examination, that you have been sincere in the practice of your duty, that your inward dispositions have corresponded to your outward actions, and that both have been according to the rule of Scripture, take the comfort of so happy a discovery. This is a good evidence that you are sanctified and renewed by the Spirit of God: This is a proof that you are united to Christ, who is “the true vine;” for none but those who are united to him can bring forth such good fruit. Consider into what a blessed state the Lord hath brought you; to be his children and his friends; to be pardoned, and sanctified, and sure of being saved. What more can you desire? Doth not the assurance of such a blessed condition deserve all the labour and pains which the inquiry can cost you? One caution, however, I must give you. Do not trust so much to one discovery of this kind as to give up all further trial. No. “To prove your own works” must be your daily employment. Renew the inquiry often; make frequent proof of yourselves; compare the result of your obser-

vations at different times, and let them serve to rectify one another.

Thus, my brethren, I have given you the best directions which I could think of, with regard to the method of conducting this important inquiry. And here it might be proper to subjoin some of those Scriptural marks or characters by which “every man ought to prove his own works.” But this would lead me beyond the limits of one discourse. I mean therefore at present to confine myself to the circumstances or marks by which you ought to try the important duty in which you have been this day employed.

Allow me then, in the conclusion of this solemn service, to put a few plain, but necessary questions to you, and to call on you to answer them, as you hope to speed at the bar of God’s judgment.

1st. By what motives were you determined to come here this day? Was it by a sense of duty, and in obedience to the command of a crucified Saviour? Was it from a mind “hungering and thirsting” after Christ and his righteousness? Or was it only in compliance with the custom of the country, and from a desire of appearing religious in the eyes of men? Would to God there were less cause than there is for this question, gross and reproachful as it may appear!

2dly. What pains were you at in preparing yourselves for this near approach to God? Were you careful to stir up in yourselves those holy and humble dispositions which constitute the “wedding garment” of those who are bidden to the feast? Or, have you, without any previous examination, or any regard to the awful fence which surrounds this table, fearlessly taken your seat among faithful disciples, without asking the Master’s welcome, or dreading his displeasure?

3dly. What benefit did you propose to reap from your attendance upon this solemn ordinance? Did you only wish to pacify your natural conscience, by doing what you apprehended to be an acceptable duty? Or did you mean to offer an outward compliment to the Almighty, in order to induce him to pardon what is past, that you might sin, as it were, on a new score? Or, on the other hand, did you come here in the hope of meeting him whom your soul loves, to take upon you “his yoke which is easy, and his burden which is light?”—to implore, over the pledges of your Saviour’s love, his mercy to pardon, his Spirit to sanctify, and his grace to strengthen you? Did you come that this holy service might have some influence to assist you in crucifying “the old man with his deeds,” and to confirm the image of God on your souls? Once more,

4thly. How were you employed while you sat at this holy table? Did you seek the Lord with your whole hearts? Did your “souls follow hard after him?” And if any vain intruding thought arose within you, did you instantly check it with abhorrence, and renew your repentance for that mixture of infirmity in your holy service? When you heard these affecting words, “This is my body broken for you, this is my blood shed for the remission of your sins,” were your hearts wrung with grief for the sins which were the cause of the Redeemer’s sufferings? Did you give yourselves entirely up to him who gave himself for you an offering and a sacrifice to God? Did you accept of him as your only peace-maker with the Father, and resolve to build all your hopes of happiness upon the merits of his sufferings and obedience? Did you renounce all his enemies, and devote yourselves entirely to his service, to be governed by his laws, as your only Lord and King?

Finally. Was all this done from a deliberate and confirmed choice, and not from a mere transient flash of devotion? Then, indeed, you have been well employed; and we desire to give glory to God on your account.

But if, on the contrary, your hearts have been cold and insensible, and your thoughts have been wandering without controul upon the mountains of vanity; if you have felt no grief for sin, no love to the Redeemer, or only such a grief and love as a moving tale might have occasioned; if what you have felt hath not led you to bind yourselves irrevocably to the service of that Redeemer who encountered the wrath of God for you—this was not to eat the Lord's Supper. Alas! my heart bleeds for you. Ye have been mocking him who hath declared that he will not be mocked with impunity; and who, unless you repent, will certainly convince you of this in another world.

These are all the questions which I shall put to you at this time; and in whatever way you may find reason to answer them, the inquiry must turn out to your advantage. If, upon search, you discover the unsoundness of your hearts, even in that very sad discovery you have the greatest advantage for salvation that you have ever had in the course of your lives. For now, your vain confidence being overthrown, you lie open to a deep and effectual conviction, which is the mercy introductive of all other mercies to your souls. Your chief danger lies in judging too favourably, or in judging falsely, of yourselves. But if you do so, how severely will you suffer for the short-lived deceit, when God shall himself prove your works, or when he shall say to you as he said to the carousing king, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting!" How confounded will you be if this sentence shall be pronounced? and

how passionately will you then wish for such an opportunity of “proving your own works” as you now enjoy?

But if, on the other hand, you can, upon good grounds, conclude, that notwithstanding many imperfections in your holy service, you have been sincere and upright on the whole, how great may your comfort be? For God will not cast off the upright man. That which is the terror of the wicked will be your joy. As the son of a king rejoiceth in his father’s power and magnificence, so may you rejoice in those displays of the divine Majesty, which scare a guilty world. How comfortable will the thoughts of a Saviour be, when you can say, “My beloved is mine;” when by faith you can, like Thomas, “put your hand into his side, and your finger into the print of the nails, and say unto him, My Lord, and my God?” With what joy will you read the Holy Scriptures, as the charter of your future inheritance, and ponder that “exceeding and eternal weight of glory,” which you shall one day possess? With what holy boldness may you approach the throne of Grace, when you can address God as your reconciled Father in Jesus Christ? How cheerfully may you endure affliction? How calmly may you leave this world?

If then any of these comforts are dear to you; if you would enjoy them in a sound state, or would have a clear and lively impression of them, let me beseech you to comply with the Apostle’s exhortation, and to “prove your own works.” So shall ye have your rejoicing in yourselves, and never be ashamed. *Amen.*

SERMON XL.

JAMES iv. 17.

Therefore, to Him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to Him it is Sin.

THE unfruitful lives of professing Christians is a very general and a just complaint. But few of those who retail this complaint are heartily inclined to remove the cause of it. We are melancholy examples of that which we pretend to lament; and we cease not to strengthen the interests of a party which we condemn. David, when he was treating with Araunah the Jebusite, for the purchase of his threshing floor, in order to rear an altar to God, refused to accept of it without a price, because he would not “offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord his God, of that which cost him nothing.” But, alas! our general contest seems rather to be, who shall be most penurious in his offerings to God, and who shall purchase heaven with the easiest service. Many have unhappily deceived themselves into an opinion, that nothing but positive acts of rebellion will subject them to punishment. They place much confidence in what is called a harmless in-offensive life, as if it were virtue enough not to be abandoned to vice. They seem to aim at nothing higher than that of which the Pharisee made his boast, when he gave thanks to God that he was not as other men, nor even as the humble publican. But, in the passage which I have now read to you, the Apostle directs us to a much safer test of our conduct; a test which leaves us

no room for mistake. The question is not, What vices have you forborne? but, What virtues have you practised? You say that you are not idolaters.—Well—but do you reverence and love the true God? You are not adulterers;—but do you study temperance and sobriety in all things? You are not slanderers;—but are you as tender of your neighbour's good name as of your own? If ye are strangers to these positive virtues, then all the advantage ye can pretend to is this; ye are sinners of a lower order, than if ye had added positive transgressions to your neglect of doing good: but still you are sinners; for, according to the Apostle, not to do good is sin.

This text evidently contains the two following propositions:

1st. That men sin not only when they positively transgress the law of God; but also, when they do not fulfil the duties which the law requires to the utmost of their power. And,

2dly. That our guilt is more highly aggravated, when we neglect the duties which are known to us; or when we decline opportunities of doing good, though we know that it is our duty to embrace them.

These propositions I will endeavour to illustrate and confirm; and will then conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

First. I begin with showing you that men sin, not only when they positively transgress the law of God, but also, when they do not fulfil the duties which the law requires to the utmost of their power.

Were we to look upon God as an austere and selfish Being, who employed his laws only as a fence about his own private interests; then indeed, not to violate them might be considered as sufficient to comply with their design. The kings of this earth are forced to en-

close their little allotment of honour, and to use their authority as a flaming sword, to ward off insults from their prerogatives. But it is not so with God. The Creator of heaven and of earth can have no dependance on the workmanship of his own hands. His prerogative cannot suffer, nor can his glory be impaired, by the feeble and impotent attempts of his creatures. His laws therefore could never be intended for his own security, but for our benefit. They are expressions of his goodness rather than of his sovereignty; and his great view in enacting them, seems to have been, to bind us by his authority to consult our present interest, and to render ourselves capable of everlasting felicity. Judge then whether a law which hath in view this kind and generous object, doth not challenge our most cordial acceptance and entire subjection; and whether gratitude, as well as duty, should not prompt us to fulfil every part of it to the utmost of our power.

Indeed, if we consider God as a severe task-master, as I am afraid too many of us do; in that case, whatever he enjoins, will appear to be an hardship or a burden. But if we view him in his true character, as a wise and good parent, who in every thing consults the real advantage of his children, then his yoke will appear to be easy indeed, and his burden to be light. The cords of love will draw us on to obedience; and gratitude, which is ever ingenious in finding out ways to express itself, will constantly prompt us to the most dutiful observance of his will.

Show me the man whose ingenuous mind, not only expects a future reward, but feels a present joy in the service of his God; and to that man I will address the words of unfeigned salutation. I will say to him, "Hail thou favoured of the Lord," thine is the true "spirit of

adoption," which deviseth liberal things; thine is that soul which is born from on high, and which doth not commit sin; thine is that love which fulfilleth the law, and which perfecteth the saints.

But show me the man whose servile soul is moved only by the fear of punishment, to yield a grudging and penurious service to his Maker; and to that man I must be sparing of consolation. I must remind him, that it is the heart which God requires; that God hath respect to the offering of a liberal giver; but that he hath no regard to the churl, or to his offering.

Thus far I might argue upon general principles, that we ought not only to abstain from what the law of God prohibits, but also to fulfil, to the utmost of our power, what the spirit or intention of the law requires. But as I speak to Christians I will now resort to an authority which they must acknowledge to be valid, and sufficient to decide the question.

The proposition which I have laid down then, is not deduced by remote inference, neither does it depend upon a single testimony; but is both supported and illustrated by a multitude of clear and express declarations of Scripture.

We are commanded, not only to "depart from evil," but "to do good;" not only to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, but also "to perfect holiness in the fear of God." Christ is proposed to us as our example; and what was his character? "He went about doing good, and persisted, till he had finished the work which was given him to do." Nay, he saith himself (John ix. 4.) "*I must* work the works of him that sent me." And if he, who voluntarily came under the law, was bound to this active and extensive service, shall we, who are its necessary subjects, plead an exemption from

it? Paul, in his epistle to Titus (chap. ii. 11.) informs us, that “the grace of God, which hath appeared to all men, bringing salvation, teacheth us not only to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, but to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world;” and that Christ gave himself for us, for this end, “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

These passages of Scripture need no commentary, all of them point out the necessity of a positive and an active obedience.

But this is not all: Our blessed Lord, who well knew what was in man, seems to have directly calculated some of his discourses to prevent the possibility of a mistake on this subject. The parables of the rich man and Lazarus, of the talents, and of the barren fig-tree, plainly appear to have been delivered with this view.

We are not told that the rich man was in any respect injurious or oppressive to Lazarus: his guilt lay in his not extending his kindness to supply his wants. The unprofitable servant was cast into outer darkness, not for losing or squandering away his talent, but for hiding it in a napkin, and neglecting to improve it. And the fig-tree was cut down, and cast into the fire, not for producing bad fruit, but because it produced no fruit at all. But lest the allegorical dress of these instructions should leave men at too great liberty to explain away the force of them, this wise and provident Teacher, in a serious and awful discourse on the process of the last judgment, resumes the same argument, (Matth. xxv. 31.—). There he tells us expressly, that men shall not only be punished for doing evil, but also for neglecting to perform active service; and in particular, for neglecting to perform the offices of humanity to their brethren. For the charge

runs in these words: "I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not."—"For in as much as ye did it not to the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me." And then follows the doom to be pronounced on those against whom this charge is brought: "These shall go away into everlasting punishment."

From these passages of Scripture, we learn with assurance, that unless life is filled up with good works, death, which introduceth us to judgment, must approach to us with a dark and gloomy aspect. When conscience, awakened with the dawning of an everlasting day, shall prompt us to inquire, What we have done? How we have improved our time, our talents, and the means of grace with which we have been favoured? If in this review of ourselves, we shall be able to discover nothing but the traces of vanity and impertinence, how must we shrink back, and tremble to venture on the awful state before us? If God will judge every man according to his works, alas! what must become of the unhappy sluggard, who hath no works to show; who hath slept, and trifled, and squandered away all his time? "O that men were wise, that they understood this; that they would consider their latter end!"—"How long, O ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?" How long, O sinner, shall that precious time on which eternity depends, be wasted in the pursuit of lying vanities? O think, how swiftly it passeth away, and how passionately thou wilt one day wish to recal it. Who can assure thee that the decree is not already gone forth against thee, "Cut him off, why cumbereth he the ground."—"Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

Pardon me, then, if I speak to you as short-lived, or as dying creatures; some of whom I may never see again till we meet before the judgment-seat of God. Under this impression, let me deal freely with you, and call on you to review your past conduct, as if the Lord himself were demanding an account of it.

Say, then, hath it been suitable to the rank you hold in life? Hath it even been rational? such as became those high intellectual powers by which you are raised above the beasts that perish? Would you consent to have it published before this congregation? Or rather, are there not some parts of it which you would wish to hide from your most intimate friends; lest, partial as they are to you, the knowledge of them should quench their affection, and render you contemptible in their eyes? Are you then ready to appear in judgment, and to have all your thoughts, and words, and actions laid open and canvassed before an assembled world?

I shall not suppose you guilty of gross acts of wickedness. Perhaps the influence of education, the power of natural conscience, and the restraints of Providence, have hitherto kept you back from these. I at present charge you with nothing worse than the omission of duty, and the neglect of opportunities for cultivating and improving the talents which God hath given you. You have been thoughtless and inconsiderate, unmindful of the God who made you, and of the Redeemer who bought you with his blood. You have forgotten the end for which you was sent into the world. You have suffered the cares and pleasures of the present life, the business or amusements of this fleeting scene of vanity, to divide your hearts, and engross your time, as if the soul had been destined to serve the body; or as if this earth had been designed for your only residence and portion.

Can you then review such a life without blushing and shame? When you think of it, doth it not appear mean and despicable even in your own eyes? And can it then be pleasing; or rather, must it not be highly offensive to that Almighty Being, who gave you a nature fitted for the performance of nobler services, and for the relish of higher enjoyments, than any with which you have been hitherto acquainted?

For the Lord's sake open your eyes, and take a serious and impartial view of your condition. Blessed be God it is not yet too late. The door of mercy is still open; and though, like the prodigal son, you have hitherto been feeding upon husks; yet when, like him, ye shall return to your Father's house, and to the faithful and affectionate duty of children, your past wandering and unprofitable life shall be forgiven; and ye may yet enjoy the honours and privileges of your Father's sons.

Having thus confirmed and illustrated the first proposition contained in the text, namely, that men sin, not only when they positively transgress the law of God; but also when they do not fulfil the duties which the law requires to the utmost of their power; I now proceed to show you, as was proposed,

Secondly. That our guilt is more highly aggravated, when we neglect the duties which are known to us; or when we decline opportunities of doing good, though we are convinced that it is our duty to embrace them.

He who doth not seek for opportunities of doing good, is a sinner; that is, he counteracts the obvious intention of his Maker in sending him into the world: and therefore shall be dealt with as an unfaithful servant, who hath not applied his talents to the purposes for which they were given him. And if this be the case, then surely the person who hath a known opportunity of doing

good, and yet wilfully neglects it, must contract greater guilt, and be liable to a severer punishment. If that man be culpable who is careless of doing all the good which by an exertion of his talents he is able to do; is not that man much more culpable, who presumptuously omits to do the good to which he has opportunities to solicit him? But why should I spend time in establishing so plain a truth, especially when it is already confirmed by the highest authority? Our blessed Lord himself expressly tells us, (Luke xii. 47.) that “the servant who knew his Lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

The only question that remains then is, Whether this be a supposition that can be made? Is it to be thought, that any man is capable of deliberately resisting his own conviction, and of declining obedience to a law which he both knows and believes to be binding on him?

I confess, indeed, that a superior Being, if we could imagine him to be altogether unacquainted with human affairs, might reject this supposition as improbable. But surely *we* have no cause to object against the representation as forced, or beyond the life. Our own observation, unless we have been extremely inattentive, cannot fail to furnish us with numberless proofs of this determined neglect of duty. We need not go from home to bring our examples from persons in high and public trust, who have been known to sacrifice the acknowledged interest and honour of a whole nation to their own private resentment or personal advantage. They are farther seen, for no other reason but because they are placed higher. The importance of their station renders their faults the more conspicuous, while a groaning community points out, as with the finger, the authors of its distress. But let each of us look into his own breast; and if conscience

is not asleep, it will say to us as Nathan said to David, "Thou art the man." Thou thyself hast neglected the fairest opportunities of doing good, when thou hadst the strongest conviction that it was thy reasonable duty.

I mean not to pry into the secrets of your hearts, any more than to divulge the secrets of my own. But I speak from a thorough conviction, that all of us pass too slightly over our omissions, even in the most serious review which we take of our conduct. We are, alas! too fruitful in excuses, and too ready to gloss over our most culpable neglects, with the specious colour of ignorance or incapacity. But God, to whom the night shineth as the day, knows the conviction of mind against which we sin; and our most dexterous arts of concealment cannot screen us from his penetrating eye. A just impression of this would prevent many fatal mistakes in our conduct.

I have now, for example, an opportunity of doing good; and my conscience tells me, that I ought to improve it. On the other hand, I have many strong temptations to neglect it. It would put me to too much cost or trouble; it would involve me in a train of action against which my indolence revolts; or it would divert me from other employments more agreeable to my inclination. On which side shall I resolve? May I not so manage it, that the neglect shall escape the observation of my neighbour? Or if he should perceive it, may I not put a good face upon it, and find out some excuse to save me from his censure? Ah! but here is the check. The Searcher of hearts knows my present conviction. In vain shall I attempt to prevaricate with him. I may elude the censure of man; but I never can escape the just judgment of that God who is greater than my heart, and knoweth all things. Such reasoning as this, if it were once become habitual to us, would be a constant

and powerful incitement to all holy obedience; and would prevent the deep guilt of neglecting to do good, even when we know the extent and obligation of the law of God, and are convinced that it is our duty to comply with it.

Having thus endeavoured to illustrate and confirm the two propositions contained in my text, I proceed now to the practical improvement of the subject. And,

1st. THIS subject administers a sharp reproof to those who, in any case, attempt to evade their convictions of duty. “To him that knoweth to do good,” saith the Apostle, “and doth it not, to him it is sin.” For, consider what kind of disposition this conduct betrays. Is it not evidently the disposition of a slavish and mercenary mind? You do no more in the service of God than you suppose to be necessary, in order to escape eternal misery; and this is the only consideration which deters you from open transgressions of his law. You have therefore no regard for him, but only a concern for your own safety. Your plan of conduct is to offend God as far as you can, without incurring his vengeance: So that any appearance of goodness about you is nothing more than the effect of a natural timidity. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Doth his goodness challenge no better return from you, than merely to refrain from acts of open rebellion against him? Consider, I beseech you, the baseness and ingratitude of this conduct; and if your hearts retain any spark of ingenuity, you will surely be persuaded to yield him a more faithful and generous service in time to come. But,

2dly. This subject administers reproof also to the slothful and inactive servant, who rests contented with low attainments in religion. You perhaps flatter yourself, that although you are remiss in seeking out oppor-

tunities of doing good, yet you are not unfaithful to any known obligation. But in this case you greatly deceive yourself. For is it not a known obligation, that we should aim at as much perfection as we are capable of attaining? But you have renounced this desire altogether. In other words, you have deliberately left off that work to which our Saviour hath expressly commanded us to devote ourselves. For, are not these his words? “Be ye perfect, even as your Father who is in Heaven is perfect.” Once more,

What hath been said on this subject ought to quicken the zeal and activity even of those who have made the greatest progress in the good ways of God.

The declining state of religion calls loudly on all who are its real friends, to exert themselves to the utmost, in order to revive its influence in the world. Nothing, be assured, will be so effectual for accomplishing this desirable object, as the bright and exemplary lives of professing Christians. Are you then zealous for the glory of God? be “zealous of good works.” Let it appear that your religion gives authority to your conscience, by your being more just, and humane, and generous than other men. “Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world.” Your divine Master hath intrusted you with the honour of that religion which he taught on earth, and expects that you should display it in an amiable light. But surely a mere negative degree of virtue will never convince men that your principles have any excellence superior to their own; and that professing Christians satisfy themselves with a virtue of this sort, is, I am afraid, in no small degree, the cause to which the rapid growth of infidelity in these times must be ascribed.

If this is at all the fact, doth it not afford us a subject of the most serious lamentation? “It is impossible but that

offences will come, but wo unto him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millstone were hang-
ed about his neck, and he cast into the sea." O then
study to adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all
things. "Let your light so shine before men, that they
may see your good works, and glorify your Father which
is in heaven." "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoe-
ver things are honest, whatsoever things are just, what-
soever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely,
whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any
virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things,"
and do them. This will administer to you true pleasure
in life, and solid hope in death; and hereafter the sound
of the last trumpet, the terror of the negligent and un-
faithful servant, will be the triumphant signal of your
release from the grave, and the summons of your Lord
to enter into his joy. *Amen.*

SERMON XLI.

PROVERBS vi. 6, 7, 8.

*Go to the Ant, thou Sluggard; consider her ways and
be wise: which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler,
provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her
food in the harvest.*

MAN was created with more understanding than the
beasts of the earth: But our minds are so debased by
our apostacy from God, that the meanest creatures may
become our teachers. And accordingly, the Spirit of

God, in the Scriptures, doth frequently send us to learn our duty from the example of the beasts of the field, and of the fowls of heaven. Thus, ingratitude is reprov'd by the example of those animals which are accounted the most stupid and untractable, (Isaiah i. 3.) "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." An inattention to the conduct of divine Providence, and a neglect of the proper seasons of activity, are in like manner condemned by the example of the fowls of heaven. "The stork knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and the swallow, observe the times of their coming; but my People (saith God) know not the judgment of the Lord," Jerem. viii. 7. To cure us of excessive carefulness and anxiety, our Saviour sends us to "consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn; yet God feedeth them: How much more," saith he, "are ye better than the fowls?" Luke xii. 24. And in my text, to cure us of negligence and sloth, Solomon sends us to a creature of the smallest size, but of most wonderful activity. "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest."

In discoursing of these words, I will,

1st, Consider the character of the person whom the wise man here addresses. And,

2dly, The counsel or advice which he gives him; and will then conclude with a practical improvement of the subject.

I BEGIN with the character of the person to whom this advice is addressed. "Go to the ant," saith Solomon, "thou sluggard:" and the character of the sluggard is

so minutely described in this book, and in the book of Ecclesiastes, that any of us may soon be acquainted with it.

Solomon observes in general, that sloth casteth into a deep sleep; and he represents the sluggard in this state in the verses immediately following my text. When it is said to him, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" Instead of being affected with the just reproach, he begs earnestly for farther indulgence, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." "As the door turneth upon its hinges, so doth the slothful man upon his bed." At length, when sleep itself hath become wearisome, and he hath risen from his bed, he hath changed his situation only to give a new indulgence to his sloth. "He hideth his hand in his bosom," and will not so much as "bring it to his mouth again." He spends his time in fruitless wishes: The soul of the sluggard "desireth and bath not." To-morrow is always a day of labour, to-day is always spent in idleness: And thus "the desire of the slothful killeth him, because his hands refuse to labour." He is discouraged by the least opposition: "The way of the slothful man is as a hedge of thorns." Every difficulty furnisheth him with an excuse for his idleness: "The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold." Nay, rather than want an excuse, he creates imaginary dangers to himself: He saith, "There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets." At length, "By much slothfulness the building decays, and through the idleness of the hands the house droppeth through."—"His field and his vineyard are grown over with thorns: nettles cover the face thereof; and the stone-wall is broken down." Thus, "Poverty cometh upon him like one

that travaileth, and his want as an armed man, till drowsiness at last clothes him with rags."

Such is the picture which Solomon draws of the sluggard; and the features are so strongly marked, that there is no room to doubt that it was drawn from the life.

Whether there are persons in the present state of society to whom all the parts of this character agree, is a question which every man will answer to himself, either from his knowledge or experience. The charge is indeed so complex, that it might be difficult perhaps to prove it in its full extent against any one individual.

We know well who they are whose hands refuse to labour, who are clothed with rags, and make poverty not only their complaint, but their argument. But though the idle vagrant is plainly described and condemned by these articles, there are other parts of the charge against which he might offer a plausible defence.

He might answer to the charge of excessive sleep, that he riseth as early, or at least is as soon abroad, as any from whom he can expect an alms: and that he is so far from hiding his hand in his bosom, that he stretcheth it forth from morning to night, to levy contributions from every passenger he sees. Nay, to strengthen his defence, might he not argue, that as the Preacher was a king, persons of a higher rank were far more likely to be the objects of his attention, many of whom eat the bread of idleness, and labour as little as the beggar? And as he speaks of fields and vineyards, that this shows him to have had sluggards of a superior order in his eye, who originally possessed some property, and held a station above the lower tribes of the people. By this defence, he will certainly elude some articles of the charge. Enough, however, will still remain to evince his right to the character in the text. And what he throws off from himself

cloth not fall to the ground, but will bear hard on the idle and voluptuous in the higher ranks of life. At the same time, there are some articles in the charge, to which those of a better station would no doubt object in their turn. They might attempt to evade the charge of sluggishness, by alleging, that though indeed they apply themselves to no active business or employment, yet the fatigues of dress, of ceremony, and of equipage; the anxieties of gaming, and the attendance on fashionable amusements, render the pursuit of pleasure in the present age as toilsome and laborious as any mechanical employment whatsoever. And that so far from being clothed in rags, which Solomon makes the badge of a sluggard, the fact is, that Solomon himself, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of them.

Were this a controversy of any importance, it would be an easy matter to detect the fallacy of these reasonings, and to show, that the defences on both sides are weak and frivolous. But this would be an idle waste of time; for as neither of the parties can deny that some parts of the description apply to them, it is of little consequence to which of them the larger share of it belongs.

But sloth is not confined to the common affairs of life, nor the character of a sluggard to men in any particular station. There is sloth in religion as well as in common life; and the description in my text applies to all, without exception, who, however active and industrious in their secular employments, neglect the one thing needful, the care of their precious and immortal souls.

The laborious mechanic, the busy merchant, the painful student, and the bustling statesman, are all sluggards in a spiritual sense, unless they are active in the love and service of the God that made them; and unless the advancement of his glory, and the final enjoyment of his

favour, are the ends to which all their pursuits are directed.

Here we are only to sojourn for a short time. Our great Creator hath made us for higher occupations and better joys than the present world affords us. He hath formed us for the knowledge and enjoyment of himself in an eternal and unchangeable state, and hath instructed us how we may attain this glorious object of our being. And therefore, however busy a man may be for himself, however industrious for his family, however active for the public; yet if all his views terminate in this present life, he is still a sluggard in the eye of God. For he who labours only for the meat that perisheth, doth as fatally counteract the end of his creation, as he that sleeps on the bed of sloth, or as he that fatigues himself in pursuing the vain and fugitive pleasures of this world. I will add, that even those who have chosen the better part, and who seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness in the first place, do often incur the imputation of sluggishness, by the omission or careless performance of what God hath required of them. For, alas! where is the man who doth “whatsoever his hand findeth to do” in the business of religion, “with all his might?” Where is the man who “strives,” as in an agony (for so the original word imports) “to enter in at the strait gate?” or who “gives all diligence to make his calling and election sure?” We see much activity in the pursuits of the world; but a very small portion of it, indeed, in that pursuit which most requires and deserves it.

I may therefore venture to affirm, that there is not one in this assembly to whom my text is not addressed in one view or another. And, therefore, without questioning the propriety of the description, let us go on, as was proposed,

Secondly. To consider the counsel or advice which the wise man hath given us: ‘Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise; which, having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.’”

He directs us to a creature, indeed, of the most diminutive size and appearance, but whose sagacity and unremitting activity strike the eye of every beholder. The ant instructeth us, not by speech, but by actions; and therefore we are called upon “to consider her *ways*;” how she is employed, and for what end she is active: not merely that we may gratify our curiosity, or even extend our knowledge of the natural world; but that we may become wiser and better. The wisdom we learn from the ant is the wisdom of living well: the wisdom of acting suitably to our superior nature, and our glorious hopes.

There are three very important lessons which we learn from the conduct of the ant. The

1st is, A foresight and sagacity in making provision for the time to come. The ant gathereth more than she hath present occasion for; and in the summer and harvest lays up a store for the approaching winter. Thus she arms herself against the rigours of the inclement season; and whilst the grasshoppers, that sung and sported in the summer and harvest; nay, whilst many creatures of larger size and greater strength, perish for want of food, she lives on the fruits of her industry, and reaps the reward of her care and providence. O that this wisdom were more common among men! and that we could be persuaded, while the season of action lasts, to “lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when we shall say we have no pleasure in

them." How dreary must the winter of life be, when the previous seasons have been passed in sloth, in idleness, or in folly; when the body languishes under poverty and wretchedness; or when the mind, unfurnished with knowledge, and virtue, and faith, and devotion, sojourns in a crazy tabernacle, tottering to the dust? A

2d lesson to be learned from the conduct of the ant is activity and diligence. The ant never intermits her labours as long as the season lasts. In summer, when the weather is hottest, at sultry noon, as well as in the cool of the morning and of the evening, this busy creature is continually in motion. either seeking her food abroad, or disposing it in her cells at home. Nay, her labours end not with the day, but, as naturalists have observed, she often takes the benefit of the moon, and plies her work with a surprising alacrity. Happy were it for man, that he as faithfully employed that precious time which is given him, either to render himself useful in this world, or to prepare for eternity. Then would he not be seen encroaching on the day by sloth, nor turning it into night by intemperance and riot. The

3d lesson which we learn from the conduct of the ant is sagacity in making use of the proper season for activity. Opportunity is the flower of time; or it is the most precious part of it, which if once lost may never return. This the ant knoweth how to seize with admirable skill. She goeth forth in quest of food when it can be had with ease and certainty: She employs her labour at the time when she knows that it will be effectual. Unlike to man, whose folly prompts him to neglect the season in which his talents might be usefully employed, till he hath lost it for ever; and who spends on trifles the day of his merciful visitation, till the things which belong to his peace are for ever hid from his eyes.

All this foresight, diligence, and sagacity, the ant employs by an instinct of nature, untutored and unawed. She hath neither guide, overseer, nor judge: There is none to go before and mark out her task; none to superintend and prompt her to her labour; none to require an account of her industry, or to punish her either for her neglect or miscarriages. This circumstance the wise man mentions with a peculiar emphasis, on purpose to draw the sluggard's attention to it. For surely nothing can be suggested of greater force and efficacy to rouse him from his lethargy, and to convince him that his sloth is not only criminal, but without excuse.

The ant hath no guide; but we, my brethren, have many guides. "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." Our Maker hath endued us with reasonable souls, capable of discerning betwixt good and evil. He hath favoured us with a complete revelation of his will, and hath showed us "what is good, and what the Lord our God requireth of us."—"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple." He hath sent his Son into the world to show us the path of life, not only by his doctrine, but by his example *too*. And he offers us his Spirit, to lead us into all truth, to open our eyes, and to turn us from darkness to light, by taking of the things of Christ, and showing them unto us. He hath assured us of his willingness to assist and to guide us. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." If men therefore are sluggards, and loiter in their work, they can neither pretend ignorance of their duty, nor the want of a guide to direct them in it.

Again, the ant "hath no overseer;" but man acts un-

der the immediate inspection of him, “whose eyes are as a flame of fire.”—“The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.”—Can any hide himself in secret “places that I shall not see him? do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?”—“Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, O Lord, but the night shineth as the day.” Besides, God hath placed an overseer in our own breasts, which acts within us as his deputy; for the voice of conscience is the voice of God. This bosom-witness marks our steps, reminds us of our duty, condemns us when we do wrong, and never fails to render those unhappy whom it fails to keep faithful to their duty. For conscience at first speaks forcibly to every human being; and many a hard struggle doth it cost even the worst of men, before this awful monitor can be silenced. Thus we have not only a guide to point out the way to us, but an overseer to attend us in every step; and therefore, if we either loiter or turn aside, we must be without excuse: “our own hearts condemn us, and God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.”

Once more, the ant “hath no ruler” or judge to call her to account for her conduct; but every one of us must give an account to God. “God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he raised him from the dead.” “We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” And it deserves our notice, that the sluggard is particularly pointed out in Scripture as one of those who shall certainly be condemned in that decisive day. This is clearly intimated to us in the parable of the talents. The unprofitable servant, who is condemned

to utter darkness, is not accused of having squandered his talent, or of having applied it to wicked purposes: on the contrary, he had preserved it entire, and returned it unimpaired to his master: his crime was, that he had not improved it. He was a wicked servant, because he had not been active for the interest of his Lord: he was, in short, the sluggard here addressed by the wise man; and his doom was just. For it is only “to those who, by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, that God will render eternal life, in the day when he shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

Thus, then, the ant, which without a guide, overseer, or judge, labours with such diligence, sagacity, and foresight for the preservation of a life which must soon come to a final period; instructs, reproves, and condemns those who, having all the advantages which are denied to her, are yet remiss and negligent in the great business assigned them: on which depend not their present interests only, but the interests and the life of their immortal spirits—of their spirits, which shall survive the dissolution of their bodies, and shall last through eternal ages.

These observations may be sufficient both to illustrate the meaning, and to show the propriety of Solomon’s advice. Let me now, as the improvement of the subject, press you to reduce to practice the lessons which I have been considering. And for this end, I would represent to you,

1st. THAT the sluggard sins against the very nature which God hath given him. For what are all the high powers and faculties with which we are endowed, but so many tokens that we were formed for active service? The nature of things has evidently in this respect the force of a law; since it is impossible to conceive, that

powers and capacities were given us, which were not meant to be exerted and improved. Even in the state of innocence man had his task assigned him, whilst the inferior animals were left to roam at large, without being accountable for their conduct. And as our natures are formed for action, so our inclination evidently prompts us to it. This is plain from the various methods by which those who will not labour endeavour to relieve themselves from the oppressive load of idleness. Their time itself is a misery: and there is nothing so impertinent to which they will not fly, that they may be free of it. The burdens of the most laborious slaves are light, when compared with the burden which the sluggard carries about with him in an enfeebled body, and a vacant, discontented mind.

2dly. The sluggard sins against the manifest design of Providence. God hath indeed made a liberal provision for the supply of all our returning wants. But he hath done this in a way that requires industry on our part, in order to render that provision effectual. The earth, by the blessing of God, is fruitful of herbs and grain for the use of man. But man must be careful to do his part in the labour of the field, that it may yield him a regular or a certain produce. The rough materials of all things necessary and convenient for the purposes of life are laid plentifully at our hands; but the skill and industry of the workmen must bring them into form, and render them fit for use. "All things are full of labour." Who then art thou, O sluggard, to counteract the design both of Nature and of Providence?

But some may say, perhaps, We have nothing to do. Our wants are abundantly supplied from the patrimony which we have inherited; and nothing remains for us but to enjoy what we have. Do you then indeed believe,

that any human being can have a right to live idle on the earth? If ye believe this, ye have yet to learn this fundamental principle of common sense, That all obligations are reciprocal. Ye sluggards, why cumber ye the ground? Shall God give you all things richly to enjoy, and is there no active service which he requires of you? Must the labour of the husbandman nourish, and the art of the manufacturer clothe you? Must all ranks of men labour for your convenience; and are there no obligations which ye are bound to discharge to them in return for so many, and so important services? For what end then do you live? Your being is an embarrassment and burden to the creation. "For if any man will not work, neither should he eat."—Once more, in the

3d place, The sluggard sins against the great design of the Gospel. For we have not only a Guide to instruct us, an Overseer to observe us, and a Judge to whom we are accountable; but we have also a great Redeemer, who shed his blood for the ransom of our souls, and who gave himself for us, not to purchase our release from duty, but to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Christ spoiled principalities and powers, "that we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our lives." Let us hear and reverence the language of the Gospel. "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and

to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Let us then be no longer "slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." *Amen.*

SERMON XLII.

JAMES iv. 13, 14, 15.

Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the LORD will, we shall live, and do this or that.

THE obvious design of this passage is to detect the folly and presumption of those who lay schemes for futurity, without a proper acknowledgment of their dependance on the providence of God. The particular scheme, which the Apostle represents and condemns, is one of the most plausible that can well be imagined. A merchant resolves on a journey to some city, in which he can carry on his trade to advantage. That he may lose no time, he saith, "To-day," or, at farthest, "to-morrow, I will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy

and sell, and get gain." There is no intimation that he meant to enrich himself by fraud or extortion. The gain he had in view may be supposed to have been the profits of a fair and honourable commerce; the honest reward of his attention and diligence.

I apprehend that none of us would be greatly startled, though we should hear some of our friends talking in the manner which is here represented. There are few of us, perhaps, who have not on some occasions held such a language, without suspecting that it was either presumptuous or wrong. In order, therefore, to discover what is faulty in it, and to enter into the spirit of this text, let us examine with attention,

1st. The form of expression which the Apostle condemns. And,

2dly. The amendment which he suggests. And if it shall please God to afford us the assistance of his Spirit, I am persuaded that several remarks will occur to us in the course of this inquiry, which may be "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness." Let us then attend,

First. To the form of expression which the Apostle condemns. "Go to now, ye that say, to-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain."

In general, we may observe, that this language relates altogether to a worldly project. The principal object is gain: "not the true riches;" or "that good part" which shall never be taken from those who choose it; but the gain of this world, the gain which is acquired by buying and selling. They say nothing of the measure of gain that would satisfy them, and nothing of the use to which they meant to apply their wealth. For any thing that their expressions imply, their desires might be without

bounds, and their sole aim might be to “heap up silver as the dust, and fine gold as the mire of the streets;” or, in the language of Isaiah, “to join house to house, and field to field, till they were placed alone in the midst of the earth.”

If this remark is just, we have already discovered one capital error in the expressions before us.—To seek gain by honest industry, either for the supply of our own wants, or to enable us to relieve the necessities of others, is not only lawful but honourable: But to seek wealth for its own sake, and merely for the sordid pleasure of possessing it, betrays a mean and selfish spirit, unworthy of a man, and much more unworthy of a Christian.

Supposing this then to be the end in view, there can be no doubt that it is in a high degree culpable. But as the Apostle is silent on this head, we shall admit, that the persons who hold the language before us, might intend to make a proper use of their riches, and proceed to examine the means by which they propose to obtain them. “To-day,” say they, “or to-morrow, we will go into such a city.” These words may pass in common conversation; but when we seriously weigh the import of them, as at present we are called to do, we shall find that they are chargeable both with folly and presumption.

The great Lord of all has no part in this scheme. These little arrogant words, WE WILL, thrust him out at once, and occupy his place. And for what do the persons here described undertake? They undertake, without hesitation, to insure their lives against death, their bodies against sickness, and their effects against every casualty or hazard. They speak of the morrow as if they had the absolute property of it. They promise themselves, that to-morrow they shall not only be alive,

but in health, to set out on their journey; that they shall meet with no cross accidents by the way; that the goods which they carry along with them shall be protected against thieves and robbers; and that in due time they shall arrive at the city where their plan of business is to be carried into execution. But what follows is still more extravagant. They promise upon life for a full year: "We will continue there a year": and not upon life only, but on health of body, and soundness of mind, during all that time. No allowance is made for the change of climate, or the fatigues of business: they are always to be in a condition to buy and sell, and to manage their affairs with activity and prudence. Nay, more, they assure themselves of success. "We will buy and sell, and get gain." They undertake, not for themselves alone, but for all whom they shall employ, or with whom they shall have commerce—that they shall have diligent and faithful servants; that they shall have large profits from those to whom they sell, and cheap bargains from those of whom they buy. In a word, they speak as if every thing relating to themselves and others were so dependant on their will, that they might command the events which they desired, and dispose of all things according to their own pleasure.

Well might the Apostle give this the name of boasting, as he doth at the 16th verse of this chapter; and had it suited the gravity of an inspired writer, he might have examined the different parts of the scheme, computed the risks which were plainly against them in every step, and thus turned the whole design into matter of contempt and ridicule. But instead of this, he arrests them at the very first outset. You talk of "going to such a city, of continuing there a year, of buying, of selling, and getting gain:"—"whereas ye know not what shall

be on the morrow." The present moment is all that ye can call your own. This night your souls may be required of you: to-day you *are* ; but to-morrow ye may be numbered with those who *have* been. He would not trifle with miserable men, who might die whilst he was speaking to them. He therefore seizeth one important truth, the force of which could not be denied, and instantly placeth it full in their view. "What is your life?" saith he, "it is even a vapour." At present it appears; but while I yet speak to you it may vanish away. Cease then, vain boasters, to talk of a year hence, until ye can say something with certainty of the succeeding day. Thus the visionary Babel falls to the ground. This plain proposition, "Life is a vapour," undermines it at once, and overwhelms the proud builders with shame.

It hath often given me pleasure to observe, that the truths which are best fitted to touch the heart, and to influence the life, are universally the most simple and obvious, and lie so near us, that we need only to stretch forth our hand to take hold of them. God knows, that we have much work to do, and little time to do it in: and therefore, that we may lose no part of it, the most useful and necessary things are scattered around us with the greatest profusion. Were it otherwise, the opportunity of acting might frequently pass away before the means of action were ready. Yet such, alas! is our folly and perverseness, that overlooking what is near, we roam abroad, and always grasp most eagerly at those things which are farthest from us. Thwarting the merciful designs of God, we despise common truths, merely because they are common; and wander in pursuit of abstruse and intricate speculations, which puzzle the understanding, and amuse the fancy, but leave the heart cold and insen-

sible. How much better was the course which the Apostle took with those who held the language of the text, in order to bring them to a sense of their folly? He doth not go about in quest of remote objects, nor seek to surprise them with new and uncommon discoveries; but he surprised them most effectually, by pointing to an object just at hand, one view of which was sufficient to check their presumption.—an object which stood always before their eyes, though overlooked through the pride, or inattention, or perverseness of their minds.

It hath already been observed, that the matter of the project, here represented by the Apostle, is in itself plausible; and that his reproof is chiefly aimed at the form or manner of expressing it. And if he treated this with so much severity, what would he have said, had the end proposed been criminal in its own nature, or the means of obtaining it base and dishonourable? What would he have said to those who puzzle themselves with schemes to get rid of their money, or to throw it away upon the most ridiculous trifles? who have no higher objects than the superfluities of dress, the luxury of entertainments, the multiplicity of diversions, and all the expensive arts of dissipation and sensuality? What would he have said to those who, in the same presumptuous style, lay deliberate schemes for low vice and debauchery, for drunkenness and whoredom, and other works of the flesh? What would he have said to those who devise methods of making gain by secret fraud or open violence? to those who practise deceit in buying and selling, or who, without either buying or selling, support a useless and pernicious life by the base and infamous occupation of gaming? Compared with these, the scheme which the Apostle condemns is wisdom, and honour, and virtue.

But the Apostle doth not rest in censuring what was

wrong. He goes on at the 15th verse to correct what was faulty, and to supply what was defective. "For that ye ought to say," adds he, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that."—This amendment, suggested by the Apostle, was the

Second thing which I proposed to consider.—And,

1st. It furnisheth us with a rule by which all our undertakings ought to be examined. Whatever scheme we have in view, to which we cannot prefix this preface, "If the Lord will," we may be assured is essentially wrong, and ought to be abandoned without delay. There is nothing truly good or profitable to us, for which we may not address God by prayer. Let us then convert the views which we have in any undertaking into the form of a petition, and try whether we can, with decency or propriety, offer up such a petition to God. Let us consider, whether the means by which we propose to compass these views are of such a nature, that we may ask or expect the divine blessing to accompany them. Happy were it for us, that all our schemes and projects were brought to this test. We should then be seasonably delivered from that fatal enchantment which first engageth us in unlawful pursuits, and then stimulates us to persist in them against the remonstrances of our own consciences.

We should then escape from those fatal snares into which our rash unadvised plans betray us. For who would dare to say, "If the Lord will, I shall live," and rob and steal, game and defraud, oppress and overreach my neighbour? Such a connexion of thought would startle the mind at the first conception of lust, before it had brought forth sin. And I am persuaded, that if men were faithfully to practise this one easy and reasonable precaution, they would at least avoid many

of those presumptuous offences which lay waste the conscience, and destroy the peace of the soul.

2dly. This amendment, which the Apostle suggests, teacheth us to consider the shortness, and particularly the uncertainty, of life. "Ye know not," saith he, "what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? it is even a vapour which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Thus David describes the life of man by those things which are most frail and fugitive in nature. "As for man, his days are as grass." Nay, as if the grass, which endures for a season, were too permanent an object of comparison, he immediately corrects the similitude, "As the flower of the field, so he flourisheth:" As the flower of the field, which is exposed to the foot of every passenger, to the tooth of every wild beast, to the wanton hand of every destroyer. It is not by rare and striking events only that the thread of life may be broken. There is no need that the thunder should break on you, or that the fire should devour you, or that the earth should open and swallow you up. Things far more common and familiar are sufficient for so easy a purpose, as that of cutting off your days. There is not an element so friendly, nor a circumstance so trifling, that it may not become the minister of death. Ought not this manifest uncertainty of life, then, to cool our pursuit of earthly projects? We are apt to meditate great and complicated schemes to attain wealth, or power, or honour in the world. But could we penetrate a little into futurity, we might perhaps see our grave opened far on this side of half way to the objects of our keenest pursuit. "For what is our life? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that we ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that."

3dly. This amendment, suggested by the Apostle, teacheth us to live in an habitual dependance on God, not only for life, but also for activity and prudence to carry our lawful designs into execution. There are two assertions in the 10th chapter of the book of Proverbs, which have a seeming opposition to each other. At the 4th verse, it is said, that “the hand of the diligent maketh rich;” where it would appear, that prosperity, in our worldly callings, is to be ascribed to our own activity and skill. On the other hand, it is asserted at the 22d verse, that “the blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich; and he added no sorrow with it.” These two assertions are not opposed; but the one is subordinate to the other; and the meaning is, that the hand of the diligent, by the blessing of God, is the means of gaining wealth and honour. Accordingly, we find that God gave this caution to his ancient people. “Beware that thou say not in thine heart, when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied, My power, and the might of my hand, hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth.” How often do we see the best laid schemes miscarry; while others, far less flattering, succeed in a wonderful manner? One man shall toil with incessant industry, rise early, and sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness, and yet all in vain. Another, who, compared with this man, hath neither a head to contrive, nor hands to execute, shall prosper in all his plans. “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.” Men are too apt “to

sacrifice to their own net, and to burn incense to their own drag." In great mercy, therefore, God denies riches to those who may be said to live for no other end but to obtain them; while, on the other hand, they sometimes drop, as it were, into the lap of others, who have no talents and little anxiety to acquire them. These observations are not meant to discourage industry or skill in the management of our lawful business. For it is still true, notwithstanding what hath been said, that wisdom excelleth folly, as much as light excelleth darkness; and that without proper means being used, we have no title to expect the blessing of God upon our affairs. But they ought to teach us to "commit our ways unto God" in well doing; to trust also in him that he may bring it to pass; to acknowledge him in all our ways, that he may direct our steps."—In the

4th and last place, This amendment, suggested by the Apostle, teacheth us to resign ourselves entirely to the will of God, and to submit all our schemes to him, to prosper or to disappoint them as seemeth good to him. This is the true spirit of the text. "If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that." Resignation to the will of God frees the mind from a grievous bondage, the bondage of earthly pursuits and expectations. Whatever God wills, is pleasing to the resigned soul; and when a Christian hath, by prayer and supplication, made known his requests to God, then the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps his heart and mind through Jesus Christ. Then only is life truly enjoyed, when we relish its comforts, at the same time that we are prepared to part with them. The anxieties of the worldly man torment him with the pangs of a thousand deaths. His soul dies within him as often as he conceives the apprehension of losing those good things which he would wish always to enjoy. Whereas he who

hath resigned his will to the will of God, "eats his bread with joy, and drinks his wine with a merry heart." Even the thought of his dying hour throws no damp on the joys of his mind. From the contemplation of God's goodness to him in life, he can pass without terror or amazement to the thought of his protection in the dark valley and shadow of death. Even in that gloomy passage he fears no evil; but commits himself to the Lord his shepherd, who will make goodness and mercy to follow him all the days of his life, and at last will bring him to dwell in his house above for ever.

These are some of the instructions which we may derive from the amendment here suggested by the Apostle: "For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live and do this or that."

From what hath been said, let us learn, in the

1st place, To guard against that extravagance in laying down schemes for the time to come, which, upon cool reflection, appears so unjustifiable in the example before us. Had the persons here described, upon finding it inconvenient to set out immediately, asked themselves this question, What assurance have we of another day? this might have given them a timely check. But their imagination having taken possession of the morrow, it carried them forward without the least interruption, brought them safe to the end of their journey, fixed their residence, transacted business, and reaped the profits of the whole ensuing year. One presumptuous step leads on to another. The first object is near, and appears to be within our reach: but if we assure ourselves of possessing that before it actually become ours, then we see another object a little farther on, which appears as near to it again; afterwards a third but a little beyond that; and thus we proceed step by step, till we have passed

the utmost bounds of probability, before we begin to suspect that we have gone any length at all. Let us then, in the

2d place, Realize this awful and important truth, That our life is but “a vapour, which appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” Die we must, and we know not how soon. Our worldly enjoyments must be relinquished, our worldly plans and projects must perish. “The wind shall pass over us, and we shall be gone, and our place shall know us no more.” Nature will look as gay on the day of our decease as it ever did; the business of the world will go on as briskly as before; our habitations will make our successors as welcome as they made us; and even our names, in a few years, shall perish as if we had never been. What wise man, then, would build his house on such unstable sand? How wretched must that man be, whose inheritance lies wholly upon earth? What pangs must he feel at the parting hour? with what horror must he hear the summons of dissolution?

Let us then be persuaded to raise our affections above the things of the earth to those things which are above. Let us plan for eternity, and let us choose the unchangeable God for our portion. Knowing that we have here no continuing city, let us seek one to come; a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Let the Lord Jesus be our leader and guardian; under his conduct let us presently set out for the heavenly Jerusalem; and in due time he will bring us safe to the city of the great and universal King, where we shall continue, not for a year only, but for ever; and where we shall get possession of substantial gain, even that glorious inheritance of the saints in light, which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away. *Amen.*

SERMON XLIII.

EXODUS XX. 8.

Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy.

THE too general and growing abuse of the Christian Sabbath, must render a discourse on this subject both seasonable and necessary; and I propose therefore, in dependance on divine aid,

1st. To inquire how far the precept in this text is binding on us.

2dly. To show how this commandment ought to be kept or observed. And,

3dly. To enforce the observance of it by some motives and arguments.

First. I begin with inquiring how far this precept of keeping holy the Sabbath-day is binding on us.

Although your stated attendance on this day, for the worship of God, may be interpreted as a public declaration on your part, that you reckon this commandment binding on you, yet the inquiry I have proposed is by no means superfluous. We are exhorted in Scripture, not only “to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts,” but likewise “to be always ready to give an answer to every man who asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us.” And if we should at all times be ready to declare the grounds of our hope, we should certainly be at least equally ready to explain and to justify the reasons of our practice. Besides, although in the judgment of charity, “which thinketh no evil,” your weekly attendance

on this day for public worship may be supposed to flow from a religious principle; yet in our present situation, it is easy to conceive, that something else than a sense of duty may occasion our meeting together in this manner. The laws of our country not only permit, but require, the observance of the Christian Sabbath: so that human authority, the manner of our education, a regard to decency, or even motives inferior to any of these, may bring people to church who have never seen themselves to be bound by any divine law to keep holy the Sabbath-day. And I am sorry to add, that there is too great cause to suspect this to be the case with many who frequent our religious assemblies, from their defective and partial observance of this holy day. I therefore judge it to be of the highest importance, to set the authority of this precept in a clear and striking light. For until we view the Sabbath as a divine institution, we shall never either pay to it that regard which it deserves, nor reap any spiritual advantage from the most exact outward observance of it. I suppose it will not be denied, in the

1st place, That some part of our time should be employed in the immediate worship of God. Reason must necessarily teach us, that such homage is due to that Almighty Being on whom we depend for life, and breath, and all things. In order to secure the regular performance of this worship, the same principle of reason will naturally suggest the propriety of allotting certain stated seasons for that purpose. If any shall dispute the necessity of this, they will at least allow us to affirm the expediency of it: for it is a common and true observation, that what is left to be done at any time is in great danger of being done at no time. I may likewise take it for granted, in the

2d place, That the right of determining what propor-

tion of time, or what stated seasons should be employed in divine worship, will be readily admitted to belong to God. This is so evident, that it scarcely needs an illustration. If we can live one moment independent of God, we may call that moment our own, and claim the disposal of it: But if we cannot draw one breath without his aid; if his constant visitation is necessary to preserve us; the consequence is unavoidable, that the whole of our time is due to God, and that his right is absolute to reserve any part of it which he pleaseth for his own worship. And this leads me to observe, in the

3d place, That God hath actually interposed his authority in this matter: and by a clear and positive law, part of which I have now read to you, hath reserved for himself one day in seven; that he hath consecrated or set apart this portion of our time, by his precept, example, and blessing, for a holy rest or cessation from secular employments, and for such acts of religious worship and adoration as creatures owe to their great Creator.

It is confessed by all who admit the inspiration of the Old Testament, that this law was strictly binding upon the Jews, to whom it was delivered by the ministry of Moses. But some have made it a question, whether it continues to be binding under the Christian dispensation. We maintain that it is still in force, in as much as it contains a declaration of the will of God, that one day in seven, or the seventh part of our time, should be separated from common use, and dedicated to religious purposes. With regard to the particular day to be observed, all days being alike in themselves, the appointment of it must be of a positive nature, and may therefore be varied at the pleasure of the Lawgiver. Accordingly we find, that in this circumstance the law hath received an alteration. The seventh, or last day of the

week, is now become common; and in commemoration of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead, the holy rest is transferred to the first day of the week; which hath ever since been called, by way of eminence, *The LORD'S Day*. Whether this remarkable change is sufficiently supported by divine authority, admits of farther inquiry. What I have hitherto said, is only intended to prove our obligation to keep one day in seven holy to the Lord; and for this, I think, I have given you very satisfying evidence. It is a natural principle, that God ought to be worshipped; and as it is highly necessary to secure the performance of such an important duty, reason farther teacheth us, that some stated times ought to be set apart for that end. The right of determining these doth certainly belong to God himself; and he hath actually been pleased to give a plain intimation of his will in this matter, claiming, by a distinct and peremptory statute, one whole day in seven, for the peculiar exercises of religious worship. Thus far, then, the commandment is strictly moral; and therefore still binding upon us, in as much as it only enjoins a natural duty, and prescribes the most effectual means for securing the performance of it.

Having established this point, the way lies more open to the other subject of inquiry; and I expect to find less difficulty in satisfying you about the alteration of the day. Some Christians, indeed, have maintained, that both days ought to be kept; but I reckon there will be no need to guard you against a mistake of this kind. You will easily convince yourselves that there is but one Sabbath in the week.

As to our practice in observing the first, instead of the last day of the week, which was the Jewish Sabbath, the reasons of it may be reduced under these following heads.

1st. We learn from Scripture, that this was the day on which the apostles and primitive Christians held their solemn assemblies for the public exercises of religious worship. Thus we read, (Acts xx. 7.) that “upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread,” *i. e.* to celebrate the sacrament of our Lord’s Supper, “Paul preached unto them, and continued his speech until midnight;” where it is observable, that their meeting together on that precise day is not spoken of as a thing extraordinary, or merely occasional, but as a stated and ordinary practice. It was their custom so to do; and Paul being on the spot, met with them, and presided in their assembly. It farther appears, that this was the day on which they laid up their public charity, and contributed for the relief of their needy brethren; and this by an express apostolical injunction. For thus Paul writes to the Corinthians, (1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2.) “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come.” In this passage, there is not only a practice of the church described, but likewise the appointment of an inspired apostle ratifying and confirming it. For if the words extend to the religious observance of that particular day, then we have a plain scriptural command for our warrant: or if they refer only to the collecting alms on that day, which is the lowest sense that they will bear, they necessarily imply, that this was a weekly holy day then in use, on which Christians ceased from their worldly business, and met together for the social worship of God; that the Apostle justified and approved of this practice,

and thereby testified his opinion that it was perfectly agreeable to the will of Christ.

Besides, we find that this day was, in the earliest times, distinguished by the title of *The Lord's Day*; for this appears from Rev. i. 10. where John informs the churches, that he "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day;" that well known day, sacred to the memory of the Lord Redeemer; the day on which he triumphed over death, and which he dignified, by his resurrection, above all other days. From these circumstances taken together, it appears, that this change took place in the apostolic age; and that the first day of the week was then esteemed holy to the Lord, and separated from the rest for religious purposes; so that though we cannot find any express command, appointing the alteration in so many words; yet we have the most convincing evidence, that it was either part of the instruction which Christ gave to his disciples before his ascension, when he was seen of them forty days, as the sacred history informs us, and spake of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God; or else that it was afterwards enacted by the apostles, in virtue of their authority derived from Christ, and under the infallible direction of his blessed Spirit.

2dly. There appear to be many great and weighty reasons for such a change. Under the Old Testament, the seventh day was kept holy in memory of the creation, because on that day God rested from all his works; and is it not equally reasonable and fit, that the first day should be sanctified under the gospel dispensation, seeing on that day the great God and our Saviour rested from all the labours of his suffering state, and rose from the dead, in testimony that man's redemption was fully accomplished? Surely the renovation of the world, after sin had in a manner broken it in pieces, is a work as

glorious and divine as the first creation of it, and as worthy to be gratefully remembered by us.

3dly. It is of some moment to observe, that this day has been uniformly kept as the Christian Sabbath from the apostolic age down to the present time. This fact is proved by the concurring testimony of historians in all the different periods of the church. At the same time, they tell us what hot disputes arose about other matters, particularly about the institution and observance of holy days. We find the Eastern and Western churches so divided with regard to the time of keeping Easter, as to proceed to excommunicate each other: but we hear of no controversy about observing the first day of the week; for in this they were all agreed. Now, what could have produced such perfect uniformity, especially in those ages, when there was no Christian magistrate to interpose his authority, but a clear conviction, and a well-grounded belief, that this was really a divine institution delivered by Christ, or his apostles, to the church? Once more, in the

4th place, God hath remarkably hallowed this day, by many acts of grace done to his people, when employed in the religious observance of it. On this day, when "the disciples were all with one accord in one place," the Spirit of God descended upon them, inso-much that they were filled with the Holy Ghost, to their own unspeakable comfort, and the admiration of all who saw and heard them. On the same day, "the arm of the Lord was" gloriously "revealed," in the conversion of three thousand souls, who were brought from a state of enmity to Christ into the bosom of the church, by the plain and powerful preaching of the apostle Peter. On this day John was inspired with the spirit of prophecy, and had visible representations of

the various revolutions in the church of Christ, down to the final consummation of all things. And in latter times God hath signally blessed his people when met together on this holy day; making all his goodness to pass before them, and giving them such views of his power and glory in the sanctuary, that they have been obliged to say with Jacob at Bethel, “This is no other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven;” a fore-taste of the everlasting Sabbath, an earnest of that rest which remains for the people of God. And is it to be supposed, that the holy and righteous Governor of the world would countenance his creatures in a superstition of their own contrivance, to the open and weekly neglect of a plain and positive law? No surely: These tokens of the Divine presence and favour dispensed on this day, are sure indications that this is the day which God himself hath made, and which he hath separated, by his authority, for the Christian Sabbath.

Thus have I finished the first thing proposed in this discourse; which was to inquire how far the precept in the text is binding on us; and I hope I have said enough to satisfy every unprejudiced mind, that it is still in force, as to the great scope and design of it; and that the change of the day, which is only circumstantial, bears such evident marks of divine authority, as sufficiently justify the uniform opinion, and uninterrupted practice, of all the Christian churches. I proceed now to the

Second thing proposed, Which was to show how this commandment ought to be kept or observed, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

This, as it is the first, so it is likewise the principal and most important branch of the precept. Nay, the full scope and design of the law is probably expressed in

these few significant words. For I cannot help thinking that the bodily rest or cessation from labour, which is afterwards enjoined, derives its chief value from its subserviency to those spiritual exercises by which the Sabbath is most eminently sanctified; and that it ought principally to be considered as a description of the means to aid us in the duties of religious worship. I think it proper to mention this distinction, because some have contended, that resting from labour is all that is meant by keeping holy the Sabbath: but surely it cannot be thought that God, who is a pure and holy Spirit, would deliver a law with such solemnity, for so mean and low a purpose as this. He who so frequently declares, that the rites and ceremonies of his own appointment were no farther acceptable to him than as they represented spiritual blessings, and were improved for promoting internal purity, cannot be supposed to take pleasure in mere inactivity, or to have appointed a weekly day of rest, solely for the indulgence of the body. Besides, this expression of *sanctifying* or *keeping holy*, not only imports a separation from common use, but likewise a consecration to a sacred or religious use. In this sense it is always employed in the Old Testament, either when it is applied to the persons of the priests, or to the vessels of the sanctuary; and no reason can be given why it should be taken in a lower sense here, or why it should import any thing less than that the day is set apart for the service of God, and ought to be employed in the duties of religious worship—I shall, in the

1st place, Give you a general account of these duties. And then we shall see more clearly, in the

2d place, What things ought to be avoided by us, as inconsistent with the scope and design of this commandment.

In general, then, we are bound to sanctify this day, by assembling together for the public worship of God, that as many as can conveniently meet in one place may join in paying homage to their common Lord; and thus contribute their endeavours to make him glorious in the eyes of the world around him. For this we ought to prepare ourselves, by the more private exercises of family-worship. And because our hearts are naturally indisposed for such divine and heavenly employments, it is both reasonable and necessary, that each person apart should spend a competent time in reading and meditating on the word of God, and implore his presence and his blessing, by humble prayer, in the secret retirements of the closet. It will also be of considerable use, to render these several kinds of religious worship more beneficial to us, that, when occasion offers, we should discourse together on divine subjects, in order to increase our knowledge of spiritual things, and to fix upon our minds a more lively sense of God and of our duty.

1st. I say, we are bound to sanctify this day by a punctual and devout attendance upon the public ordinances of religion, assembling together in the name of the Lord, to offer up the sacrifices of prayer and praise; to hear his word explained and applied; and especially to partake, as often as we have opportunity, of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the memorial of our Saviour's death, and the pledge of his second coming. In such duties as these, did the people of God in former times chiefly employ themselves on the Holy Sabbath. Under the old dispensation, sacrifices were offered, and incense burnt in the temple, and the law was publicly read and explained, both at Jerusalem and other cities of Judea, where synagogues were built for that very end. After the resurrection of Christ, the apostles and

primitive Christians met together statedly on the first day of the week, that they might join in celebrating that great and propitious event, and in performing other acts of social religion. And ought not we to sanctify the Lord's day in the same manner? We are blessed with the ordinances of the gospel regularly, and I hope, purely dispensed. We have places set apart for public worship, and are countenanced in the exercise of it by lawful authority, and therefore it must discover a strange perverseness of temper, and an unpardonable contempt both of God and man, to withdraw from the place of public worship, and, on any pretence whatsoever, to refuse to bear a part in such a becoming and rational service. But,

2dly. That the public worship may have a greater efficacy, and that our minds may be better disposed to enter into it, it is the duty of each family apart to spend some time, both before and after the public service, in reading the Holy Scriptures, and in joining together in prayer and thanksgiving to God. Were this practised in a serious and devout manner, we might expect to see better days, and more fruitful and joyful Sabbaths than any we have yet seen. A congregation composed of a number of holy families, just come from conversing with God at home, to worship him together in the house of prayer, would be indeed a lovely sight, and could not fail to be honoured with the special marks of divine favour. We have some illustrious examples of family-religion recorded in the Old Testament; but what chiefly ought to engage the attention of Christians, is that our blessed Lord himself was pleased to become a pattern to us in this matter. In the intervals of his public work, we find him frequently retiring with his little family, praying with them, and teaching them to pray, and instructing them in things pertaining to the kingdom of

God; in this, as in all other things, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps. Family-religion, therefore, a duty incumbent on us at all times, must be in a very peculiar manner seasonable and necessary on the holy Sabbath. It deserves our notice, too, that this command is particularly addressed to heads of families; and as they are expressly enjoined to suffer nothing to be done by any under their inspection, which is inconsistent with the due observance of the Sabbath, this injunction plainly implies, that, in their station and character, they ought to employ their natural authority, as well as every other means, to promote the great ends of this holy commandment. I added, in the

Sd place, That as our hearts are naturally indisposed for spiritual exercises, we ought each of us, by ourselves, to make conscience of the secret duties of the closet. There we ought to meditate on the marvellous works of God; on his glorious perfections, as they are displayed to us, in creation, providence and redemption; above all, on that great "mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." In this sacred retirement, we ought to revolve in our minds the various steps of our Lord's humiliation, from his birth at Bethlehem to his burial on Mount Calvary. Thence we should proceed to view the triumphs of his cross, where he bruised the old serpent's head, finished transgression, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness." To confirm our faith, and increase our joy, our meditations ought to follow this Mighty Conqueror, and to contemplate him breaking the bands of death, and rising from the grave on this first day of the week, ascending up to heaven in the sight of his disciples, and sitting on the right hand of

God the Father; from whence he shall come, in power and great glory, to judge the world in righteousness, according to this gospel which is now preached in his name. When, by such meditations as these, our hearts are warmed and enlivened, we should then, with all humility and reverence, approach the throne of grace; imploring those mercies which we need for ourselves, and begging a divine blessing to accompany the outward means of grace, that with our fellow-worshippers, we may be made to taste of the fatness of his house, and may find his ordinances to be indeed the wisdom and the power of God, “the saviour of life unto life” to our souls.—The

4th and *last* particular which I mentioned, is mutual conference upon divine things. This is of great use to make the truths of religion plain and familiar to us. It stirs up our affections, and makes our knowledge more lively and more operative, both on our hearts and lives. It confirms and strengthens our faith, and brings much joy and comfort to our souls, by showing us, that as face answereth to face in water, so doth the heart of one true Christian to that of another. In this exercise holy men of old have employed themselves, and met with singular tokens of divine favour and acceptance. At no time surely can such conference be more seasonable than on the Christian Sabbath: and it is owing probably to the neglect of this, that the preaching of the word, and other parts of public religious service, are so generally fruitless and unsuccessful. I have thus given you a general account of the manner in which the Sabbath ought to be sanctified. In the *next* discourse, I shall consider the prohibitory part of the commandment, and endeavour to enforce the observance of it by some motives and arguments. *Amen.*

SERMON XLIV.

EXODUS XX. 8.

Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it Holy.

I HAVE already endeavoured to prove that we are strictly bound by this divine precept to keep one day in seven holy to the Lord; and that the change of the Sabbath, from the seventh to the first day of the week on which our Lord rose from the dead, bears such evident signatures of divine authority, as are sufficient to justify the uniform opinion, and uninterrupted practice of all the Christian churches in this matter. I have also endeavoured to explain the commandment itself, and to give you an account of the manner in which the Sabbath ought to be sanctified. I now proceed to consider the prohibitory part of the commandment, and to enforce the observance of it by some motives and arguments.

The prohibition chiefly respects bodily labour. “The Sabbath-day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God,” saith the Supreme Lawgiver; “in it thou shalt not do any work.” It is expressed, you see, in very strong and absolute terms, and was for a long time understood by the Jews in a very rigid sense, in so much that they thought it even unlawful to defend their lives when they were attacked by their enemies on that day. So universally did this opinion prevail among them in the beginning of the wars of the Maccabees, that, in some instances, it proved fatal to many of them. But this was afterward, by the universal consent of the learned in their law, de-

clared to be a mistake : and indeed, from the design of the precept, from other passages of Scripture, and especially from our Saviour's instruction and example, it appears, that some kinds of work are perfectly consistent with the rest which is here enjoined. Of this nature are works of necessity, *i. e.* works which cannot be done the day before, nor delayed till the day following. Thus, for instance, should a fire break out on the Sabbath, we may and ought to use every mean to extinguish it. Should our enemies attack us, it is lawful to resist them : if we are at a distance from church, we may travel as far as is necessary, in order to hear the word of God, and to join with others in public worship. For, as our Saviour tells us, "the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath;" and the means are never to be set above the end ; nor is resting on the Sabbath to be interpreted so as to exclude the religious employment of it.

In like manner, works of charity and compassion are lawful on this day. Our Lord wrought many miracles of mercy on the Sabbath, and vindicated his conduct against those who found fault with him, by such maxims as plainly show, that offices of charity are not only allowable but praise-worthy, and are perfectly consistent with the rest which is here enjoined.

But then it is absolutely unlawful to pursue our worldly business on this day ; because this thwarts the great end and design of the commandment, which ordains the seventh part of our time to be statedly employed in the immediate service of God, that we may thereby become better acquainted with him, and may become more fit for an eternal communion with him in heaven. The very intention of the law is to set apart a certain proportion of our time for the care of our souls ; which,

amidst the hurry of our secular affairs, we are too apt to neglect.

To apply ourselves therefore to our ordinary business on the Sabbath, to talk of it, or even to spend our thoughts on it, is doing what we can to frustrate the gracious designs of the Lawgiver, and must necessarily be of infinite hurt and prejudice to our souls. And if our worldly employments, which are not only lawful, but even necessary on other days of the week, are criminal on this day, you will easily perceive, that sports and recreations must certainly be considered as included in the prohibition: for these are still more opposite to the proper business of the Sabbath, and have not the remotest pretence either to necessity or usefulness. To have recourse to amusements on this day, is wantonly to throw away our time without any advantage; and carries in it a plain declaration, that we have no relish for spiritual things; and that, rather than think of God, and the concerns of our souls, we will banish reflection altogether, and study to forget both God and ourselves. It was the judgement of one of the fathers, that it was more lawful to plough than to dance on the Lord's day; and the same thing may be said of all other diversions, which entirely withdraw us from the business of religion, and will not suffer our minds to be serious and composed. If it is criminal to work or to labour on this day, it must evidently be still more so to waste the time in carnal mirth, or in indolence and sloth, or in vain and trifling amusements. In a word, whatever is foreign to religion, or has not a direct tendency to glorify God, and advance our own spiritual interest, ought carefully to be avoided on this holy day, as we regard the approbation of God, and our own present and eternal happiness.

Having thus laid your duty in this matter before you, it only remains, in the

Third and last place, That I enforce the practice of it by some motives and arguments. And,

1st. Allow me to observe, that though this commandment were to be considered as a mere positive institution, or only as a test of our obedience and subjection to God; yet the portion of time which is thereby separated from common use, is so very moderate, that we have not the remotest cause to complain of it. I am even persuaded, that were God to refer the matter to ourselves, and, after having represented that he had brought us into being, and would allow us a certain term of life in his world, were to ask us what portion of our time we would freely resign to his disposal, as an acknowledgment of his righteous title to the whole, we should be ashamed to offer so little as he hath been pleased to demand. I am apt to think, that, instead of every seventh day, we should have thought every other day, or the full half of our time, the least that could be offered in return for such undeserved goodness. Put the case, that any of you were lying on a death bed, and God should say to you, How much of your time will you consecrate to my service in future, if I shall now be pleased to restore you to health again? I suppose most of you would reply, without any hesitation, Lord, I make no conditions: I put myself wholly into thy hands: demand of me whatsoever thou wilt. Hear how Hezekiah expresseth himself, after his miraculous recovery from a deadly disease, (Is. xxxviii. 19, 20.) “The living, the living, he shall praise thee as I do this day. The father to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me; therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord.” He doth not limit his resolutions of thanksgiving and praise to the Sabbath day: he

thought all the days of his life a tribute of consecrated time small enough in return for the goodness which had rescued him from the grave. And is it possible, that any of us should judge one day in seven too much, even though the duties required on it were in their own nature disagreeable, and had nothing to recommend them but the mere authority of the Lawgiver? Nay, my brethren, I shall put the case a little stronger. Suppose yourselves in the immediate prospect of death, either by sickness or by some external cause, and that God should say to you in these circumstances, I will save you from this danger, on condition that every seventh day you will quietly submit to the torments of some acute distemper, as long as I shall continue you in the world. Do you imagine that you would reject these terms? God knows, and yourself know, that you would not reject them; the offer would appear too good to be refused. If God then requires nothing more severe than this, your own reason must tell you that there is no cause to complain. But what are the duties which God requires of us? Are they disagreeable in their own nature? Have they no value or excellence in themselves? On the contrary, they are infinitely fit and reasonable, and every way calculated to give the truest satisfaction, the most sublime pleasure, to the soul of man. This I shall state as a

2d Argument for enforcing obedience to the commandment in the text. What can be more rational or delightful to a well-informed mind, than to contemplate the wonderful works of God in creation, providence, and grace? What can be more becoming, than to join with others in adoring the perfections of the Father of our spirits, and in ascribing that glory which is due to his name? Can any thing be more pleasant, than to retire from the hurry of a vain world, that without reserve we

may pour out our hearts, and lay open the secret desires of our souls, in the presence of that great Being, whose nature disposeth him to pity us, and whose power enables him to bestow upon us, in the fullest and most effectual manner, every blessing that can promote our most important interests? Can any entertainment be more rational, more truly divine, than to read the lively oracles of God, and to converse with our fellow Christians, upon the most interesting of all subjects, the salvation of our souls, and the means of securing an “inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away?” One should think that a bare counsel, nay, even a permission to spend one day in seven in such pleasant and profitable exercises, would be regarded as a singular privilege that deserved our warmest returns of gratitude and praise. The force of this argument is not weakened, because those who are alienated from the life of God have no relish for the pleasures which arise from the exercises of devotion. It is not the reason of the thing which leads the depraved mind to account “the Sabbath a weariness,” or to say, “When will the Sabbath be over?” After six days spent in provision for the body, is one day too long to care for the soul? Nay, after deducting the time which is necessarily employed in sleeping, and eating, and drinking, can we not find as much in God, in Christ, and in heaven, as may afford us entertainment for the scanty remainder of twenty-four hours? Alas, my brethren, how shall we employ an everlasting Sabbath, if one Sabbath in the week is so tedious and burdensome? Can these be candidates for immortal glory, who think one day too long for the work of heaven, unless they relieve themselves, by consuming the greater part of it in idle conversation or trifling amusements?—My

3d Argument to enforce this commandment shall be taken from the many advantages which flow from the religious observance of the Sabbath. Hereby we shall obtain the blessing of God, according to that large and comprehensive promise, (Isaiah lviii. 13, 14.) "If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words; then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." If we honour God on this separate day, which he claims as his special property, then may we expect to be honoured by him on the other days of the week, which he hath given us for our own use. The truth of this hath been frequently experienced by the people of God; and among these, too, by some of the most eminent characters, not only for piety, but also for learning and taste, and knowledge of the world. I shall mention one who was highly respected in his own time, and whose character and writings are to this day universally esteemed. The learned Judge Hales, speaking of his experience on this subject, hath these words: "I have found," saith he, "by a strict and diligent observation, that a due observing the duty of this day, hath ever had joined to it a blessing upon the rest of my time; and the week that hath been so begun, hath been blessed and prosperous to me. And, on the other side, when I have been negligent of the duties of this day, the rest of the week hath been unsuccessful and unhappy to my secular employments; so that I could easily make an estimate of my successes in my own secular employments

the week following by the manner of my passing this day. And this," adds he, "I do not write lightly or inconsiderately, but upon a long and sound observation and experience." Nay, the right observance of this duty will procure national as well as personal blessings: for so God promised to his ancient church, (Jer. xvii. 24, 25.) "If ye diligently hearken unto me, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots, and on horses, they and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and this city shall remain for ever." I do not mean by these arguments to bribe you into a mercenary or political observance of the Christian Sabbath. Should you spend the whole day in reading, praying, praising, or any other forms of religious worship, merely, or even principally from a regard to your own private interest, or to the public prosperity of the nation to which you belong, I must be so faithful as to tell you, that it would not be accepted. Nay, God would number these hypocritical services among your most provoking sins. For it is the heart which God requires; and if that be withheld, he will accept of no outward homage. But I mention these things to show you, that Sabbath-breakers must be utterly inexcusable, when they transgress a law, which is not only most reasonable in itself, but which hath also peculiar promises annexed to it, of temporal prosperity and happiness. And with the same view I am now going to add a

4th Consideration for enforcing obedience to this commandment, namely, That the transgression of it is attended with many sad and fatal consequences. God hath

frequently punished this sin, by inflicting very awful judgment both upon societies and particular persons. There was an express statute in the Jewish law, appointing the Sabbath-breaker to be put to death, (Exodus xxxi. 12, 16.); and this punishment was actually inflicted upon one who was found gathering sticks on that holy day: "All the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died, as the Lord commanded Moses." Num. xv. 32, 37. How alarming is that threatening. (Jerem. xvii. 27.) "If ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the Sabbath-day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath-day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched." Accordingly, Nehemiah imputes all the calamities which befel the Jewish nation to this, as one of the principal causes of God's anger against that people. "Then, (saith he) I contended with the nobles of Judah, and said unto them, What evil thing is this that ye do, and profane the Sabbath-day? Did not your fathers thus, and did not our God bring all this evil upon us, and upon this city; yet ye bring more wrath upon Israel by profaning the Sabbath." And I am verily persuaded, that many of the national calamities with which we have been visited, may justly be attributed to the same cause. Nor is it greatly to be wondered at, when we consider, that this sin is not only an act of rebellion against the authority of God, but also a bold and sacrilegious invasion of his property, in applying to common use that proportion of time which he hath reserved for himself, and set apart for the immediate exercises of his worship.

But besides this, the abuse or neglect of the Sabbath must be attended with pernicious consequences on seve-

ral other accounts. To this gracious institution it is in a great measure owing that any sense of God, and of divine things, is preserved in the world. Were this day rendered common, the bulk of mankind would soon sink into Atheism or utter profaneness. What would become of the lower ranks in society, whose servitude and bodily necessities oblige them to work hard for daily bread, were it not for this separated day, on which they are invited and commanded to care for their souls? I am even afraid, that the tyranny and covetousness of many masters would incline them to deny their servants any leisure whatsoever, either for the rest of their bodies, or the improvement of their minds, had not God, in mercy, made a law for one day of rest and liberty in the week. In proportion as this law is despised and neglected, in the same proportion will religion fall into decay, the impressions of God become feeble and languid; while ignorance, brutality, oppression, and all the evils which unrestrained corruption can produce, will prevail, and render this earth the very suburbs of hell.

These are all the arguments which I shall at present use with you, for enforcing the observance of the Christian Sabbath. The proportion of time is so moderate, that even upon the supposition that the duties required were painful, there could be no just cause of complaint. Yet so far is this supposition from being true, that, on the contrary, the work assigned us on this holy day is most pleasant and delightful; insomuch that were our minds in a right temper, we would count it our happiness to spend our whole time, nay, a whole eternity, in such heavenly employment. Besides, the religious observance of this holy day is accompanied with many signal advantages, and is a mean of deriving the blessing of God, both upon individuals and communities; where-

as the profanation or neglect of it is in every respect pernicious, both to particular persons and to societies.

And if these things are so, how many who now hear me ought to blush, and be ashamed to lift up their faces either before God or man? But as reformation is the great object which I have in view, I shall spare the reproof which I once intended to give; and instead of upbraiding you for the time past, I shall rather entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, to behave more dutifully for the time to come. And my exhortation shall be chiefly directed to parents and masters of families, to whom the commandment seems to be principally addressed. It is true, the expression "within thy gates," may relate to the gates of a city as well as of a particular house; and then it would intimate to us this truth, that it is the duty of magistrates to secure the observance of this day, by the exercise of that power and authority with which their public station invests them. But as there would be less occasion for the interposition of civil authority, if parents and heads of families would mind their proper work, to these I shall more directly address what I have to say. And I must tell you in the name of God, that you are strictly accountable, not only for your own conduct, but likewise for the conduct of all within your houses on this holy day. Hear how the commandment runs: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy; six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor the stranger that is within thy gates." You see that you are charged with the immediate inspection, not only of your children and servants, but likewise of the stranger who sojourns with you, over

whom you have no jurisdiction or authority through the rest of the week.

I should be glad to know what those who keep houses of public entertainment think of this doctrine. A respectful complaisance and readiness to serve are the general duties of your station. But there is one day of the week on which God permits, nay commands you, to take rest to yourselves, and to keep your doors shut against idle and profane of what rank soever, and to restrain such as necessity brings to your houses from every thing that is profane, either in speech or behaviour. If any shall question your authority, this precept is your charter, vesting you with the same power over the stranger that is within your gates, as over your own children and servants; and even charging you to exercise that power, as you would not incur the wrath of Almighty God. Did you know that you possessed so high a privilege? I hope, for your own sakes, that you did not; and now that I have told you the secret, I pray that God may give you wisdom and courage to improve it.

To conclude: Let all of us be persuaded to pay a proper regard to this divine precept. If we have any concern for the glory of God, for the honour of our Redeemer, for the welfare of our country, or for our own comfort and happiness, either in this world or the world to come, let us make conscience of the important duties of the Lord's day, that after having finished our course on earth, we may be fixed as pillars in the temple above, and may spend an eternal Sabbath in the presence of God and of the Lamb. *Amen.*

SERMON XLV.

2 SAMUEL vi. 20.

Then David returned to bless his Household.

FROM the example of this great and good man, I propose to recommend to you the important, but much neglected duty of family-worship. And I have chosen the example of a king for two reasons.

1st. Because the actions of one in that elevated station are commonly more regarded than those of a meaner person. “The poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard;” but if one arrayed in royal apparel make an oration from a throne, the people shall give a shout, saying, “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” This partial regard is indeed a sore evil under the sun; but in the present case, it is possible to bring good out of it, by making that pomp or splendour, which so often covers the deformity of vice, a mean of throwing a lustre upon religion, and of rendering a thing so truly excellent in itself more respectable in our eyes.

2dly. It is but too obvious, that the neglect of family-worship prevails chiefly among those who either are, or imagine themselves to be, of a better rank than others; nay, some who were punctual in the performance of this duty while their station and circumstances were low, have been observed to lay it aside, when, by the bounty of Providence, their state became more prosperous. This presents us with a very melancholy prospect, and threatens nothing less than the utter extinction of family-

religion. For if once it becomes a maxim, that this duty is below the rank of a gentleman, then every one who affects to be thought of that rank will forbear it. In this case, it is impossible to foresee where the evil may stop; as there are few people in the world who do not imagine that they either are, or deserve to be, of equal consideration with their neighbours. I have therefore thought it necessary to pitch upon nothing lower than a royal example, that the vanity of no man may take it amiss when I call upon him to follow it.

We have an account, in the preceding verses, of David's bringing up the ark of God from the house of Obededom into his own city. This was done with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet; the king himself, girded with a linen ephod, attending the solemnity, with the highest expressions of thankfulness and joy. When the ark was set in its place, in the midst of the tabernacle that was prepared for it, then David, as we read in the 17th verse, offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord, and afterwards dismissed the assembly with presents which he dealt among all the people, having first blessed them in the name of the Lord of hosts. This he did as the Father of his people. But he did not stop here. The duties of his public office and character did not make him forget what was incumbent upon him in his private capacity; for, as my text informs us, "Then David returned to bless his household;" *i. e.* to pray with them and for them, and probably to offer up his family-thanksgivings for the great national mercy which he had been celebrating in the public assembly. From this plain and instructive passage of Scripture-history I shall take occasion, in the

First place, To prove, that it is the indispensable duty of all to whom God hath given families, to wor-

ship God publicly in their own houses; or, that every man is bound, according to the example of David, "to bless his household." In the

Second place, I shall show you the reasonableness of this duty. And then, in the

Third place, I shall represent to you the advantages which accompany the practice of it, and the pernicious consequences which must follow from the neglect of it.

I BEGIN with proving, that it is the indispensable duty of all to whom God hath given families, to worship God publicly in their own houses. This is a truth which even the light of Nature doth very plainly teach us. A family is a society connected together by such strict ties, that every argument for the propriety of private prayer is equally conclusive for that of family devotion. Of this even the Heathens were sensible; for besides their tutelary deities, who were supposed to preside over cities and nations, and who had public honours paid to them in that character, we read of household-gods, whom every private family worshipped at home as their immediate guardians and benefactors.

But the light of Scripture affords us a more clear and satisfying discovery of our obligations to this duty, as well as of the proper manner of performing it. It reveals to us that great Mediator, by whom we have access to the throne of grace, and through whom all our religious services are accepted by God. It not only represents prayer as a privilege which we are permitted to use, but expressly requires it as a duty which we are bound to perform. Thus we are commanded, "In every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto God; to pray always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and to continue in prayer." And it is observable, that this last exhorta-

tion is particularly addressed to masters of families, as you may read, (Coloss. iv. 1, 2.) "Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven." The Apostle goes on, still addressing them in the same character; "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same, with thanksgiving." In the same strain Paul writes to Timothy, (1 Tim. ii. 8.) "I will therefore, that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath or doubting." And surely, if in all places men ought to lift up holy hands unto God, much more ought they to do so in their own families, which are immediately under their care, and for whose spiritual as well as temporal interest they ought to be chiefly concerned. Accordingly, we learn from the sacred history, that this has been the uniform practice of good men in all ages of the world. The care of the ancient Patriarchs, to keep up family-religion, is very remarkable. We find Abraham rearing up altars wherever he came: And for what end did he this, but that on these altars he might offer sacrifices, and call upon God with his household? We have another bright example of this in Job, of whom we read, (Job i. 5.) that "he sent for his sons and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt-offerings for each of them." And lest it might be thought that this family-worship was only occasional and accidental, it is added at the close of the verse, "Thus did Job continually." Nor was this peculiar to the patriarchal state, when each family was a church by itself; but the same good practice was continued after the Jews were formed into a national church, and had priests appointed to preside in the public worship. Thus Joshua vowed, not only for himself, but likewise for his house, that they would serve the Lord: which plainly imports

a resolution on his part to use all the means in his power to make his family do so: particularly to worship God before them, and to take care that none should dwell in his house who would not join in this holy service. The example of David in the text is abundantly plain; for though he had priests and Levites about him, yet he did not devolve the work upon them, but he himself, as head and master of the house, “blessed his household.”

In the New-Testament writings it is very usual to give private families of devout Christians the name of *Churches*. But surely this would have been a most improper appellation, if God had not been publicly acknowledged,* and the daily sacrifices of prayers and praises had not been offered in them.

These, I think, are sufficient intimations of the will of God in this matter; and may serve to convince any man, who acknowledgeth the divine authority of the Scriptures, that it is the unquestionable duty of all who have families to maintain the worship of God in their houses. The reasonableness of this duty was the

Second thing which I proposed to show: and this, I hope, will appear from the following considerations.

1st. Families are natural societies, formed originally by God, and held together by his Providence. Previous to all civil or religious establishments families subsisted. All the obligations which are incumbent on communities of any kind were originally, and still continue to be, incumbent on particular families. Were the present state of society to be dissolved, and the patriarchal state restored, it is evident that family-worship would be the only worship of God. Is it possible, then, that this original obligation can ever be cancelled? What is there to be plead as a reason for cancelling it? Will you say,

that the private duty is superceded by the public ordinances which we have the opportunity of attending? This argument might as well be used to disapprove the obligation to secret and personal devotion: and therefore, by proving too much, it proves nothing at all. For can any person seriously be of opinion, that the providence of God hath bestowed these public advantages on us, in order to relax the obligations which we owe to him in our houses and in our closets? But,

2dly. As God is the founder, so he is likewise the gracious benefactor of our families. All the blessings which we enjoy flow from his bounty, and depend entirely on his favour. Surely, then, if personal blessings claim the private acknowledgments of the person who receives them, family blessings ought in like manner, to be acknowledged by united thanksgivings in our household. Were a man, having a numerous offspring, to receive some signal favour from an earthly benefactor, by which his circumstances were changed from meanness and want to an easy or a decent competence; would it not be a natural acknowledgment for him to bring his family and children in their best apparel, and present them to his benefactor, fed and clothed with his bounty, to offer him their united thanks? Would not such a scene be delightful on both sides? Would it not be enjoyed as a very lovely appearance, even by a mere spectator? And is there less beauty or propriety in the same acknowledgments offered to the God in whom we live and breathe, and who giveth us all things richly to enjoy? Doth he set the hedge of his protection around us, and defend us from the many evils to which we are continually exposed; and shall he yet have no tribute of praise offered up from those houses in which he maketh us to dwell in safety? How disingenuous and unreasonable must this appear to every candid and grateful mind!

3dly. As we receive all our family blessings from God, so we are guilty also of many family sins against him; and ought therefore to join together in the penitent confession of our sins, and in deprecating the judgments which we have deserved. In a word, whatever reason there is for single persons to worship God, there is the same reason for families to do it. As there are personal sins, and wants and mercies, so there are family sins, family wants and troubles, family mercies and deliverances; and therefore it must appear highly reasonable, that the members of each family should unite together in humiliation and prayer and thanksgiving. Those who sin together, should ask forgiveness together; and those who receive mercies together, should join in praising their common benefactor.

Thus have I endeavoured to show, that family-worship is not only a duty by virtue of the divine command, but is so fit and becoming in itself, that although the authority binding us to it were less apparent, yet every man who allows himself to think, must immediately be convinced, by his own reason and conscience, that such homage is certainly due to God, and that they are highly criminal who refuse or neglect to offer it. I proceed now, in the

Third place, To represent to you the manifold advantages which accompany the practice of this duty, and the pernicious consequences which flow from the neglect of it.

1st, Then, the practice of this duty would be of great use to promote even your temporal and worldly interest. I address myself to you who are parents or masters; and surely this consideration must appear in your own eyes to merit some regard. I need not stay to prove to you, that your prosperity, as well as your comfort, depends

very much upon the dutiful behaviour of your children, and the fidelity of your servants. This, I suppose, you will readily acknowledge. Now it is evident to a demonstration, that nothing can contribute more effectually to this than the good practice which I am recommending to you. Bring the fear of God into your families, and that will secure your authority better than any thing else can do. The influence of a religious principle will be as powerful and operative when you are absent from them as when you are present, because God is always present; and consequently the obedience which flows from a regard to him, must in every place, and at all times, be the same. Hereby, too, you will gain their esteem and love; which are the most powerful and permanent of all bonds of duty. There is a certain majesty in the image of God, which commands reverence to itself, even from the worst of men. Thus, we are told of Herod (Mark vi. 20.) that he feared John, because he knew him to be a holy and just man. And if this wicked prince was so much overawed by the exemplary holiness of a mean subject, how venerable must a devout parent or master appear in the eyes of his own family, when, besides that authority which his station gives him, they see him adorned with that piety and regard to God, which of themselves would dignify him, and render him worthy of their esteem and honour? How must it endear him in their hearts, to behold his anxious concern for their welfare; to hear him morning and evening commending them to the protection of Almighty God, imploring the pardon of their sins, and earnestly soliciting the same blessings for them which he begs for himself? And how must this esteem and love influence their whole behaviour, and make them not only faithful, but cheerful, active, and zealous in every part of the duty and service which they

owe him? I am aware, that many think to maintain their authority in their families by other sort of prayers than those I am recommending: I mean, by horrid curses and imprecations; yea, some are so abandoned as to plead the necessity of these to render their orders effectual. But this practice must appear so absurd and odious to every thinking person, that, I am persuaded, I need not spend your time in exposing it. Such a vile and impious habit must evidently destroy at once all that esteem and love, which are the only sure and permanent principles of obedience. Their whole authority, therefore, must lean on the precarious foundation of a servile fear, which God, who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, can remove when he pleases; and then they shall become utterly contemptible, and may curse on without having any person to regard them, till their own curses overtake them. But,

2dly. As the practice of worshipping God in your houses would contribute much to your worldly prosperity, in the manner I have just now explained; so it has likewise a manifest tendency to promote your spiritual and eternal interest. It is not only a considerable branch of that homage which you owe to God, but it may be also of great use to restrain you from sin, and to render you cautious and circumspect in every part of your behaviour. A man will be ashamed to do any thing against the honour of that God whom he so publicly acknowledges before his family; and the very desire of appearing consistent with himself in the eyes of his children or servants, will hardly fail to produce at least an outward decency, and to restrain him from many of those scandalous sins, which he might otherwise be in danger of committing. So that though family-worship served no higher purpose than to hedge in our practice before our

household, I should even think that a considerable recommendation of it; and every wise and good man must esteem and value it upon that account. But this is one of the least of its happy effects. The practice of this duty would not only render our outward conduct cautious and decent, but would also tincture our minds deeply with a sense of God, and of divine things. It would give us greater boldness, too, in our secret approaches to the throne of grace. How can that man have any confidence or enlargement of heart in secret prayer, whose conscience reproacheth him with never having honoured that God in public, from whom he is now going to ask the most unmerited favours? It is true indeed, that our Lord, in great condescension, granted a private audience in the night season to Nicodemus, who had not the courage to own him in the face of the day; but no man hath reason to expect the same indulgence now. Nay, however uncharitable it may be thought, I must declare it as my opinion, that the neglect of public duties gives too just ground to suspect, that those of a more private nature are either little minded, or superficially performed. For, did you obtain access to God in secret prayer, and taste the sweetness of holy communion with him in your closets, there can be no doubt that you would thereby be disposed to the duties of social worship.—A

3d Advantage of family-worship is, That under the influences of the divine Spirit, it is one of the most effectual means of promoting the salvation of all your household. Many godly persons have ascribed their own vital impressions of religion to their living in a devout family; and many a sinner, ruined by vice and evil habits, has too justly laid the blame of it on the wickedness of those with whom he dwelt. What numbers of children and servants have been lost for want of that good example

which it was the duty of their parents or masters to have given them? As in a profane and sensual family there are continual temptations to sin, to swearing, lying, intemperance, and contempt of God; so in a devout, well governed house, there are continual incitements to a holy life, to faith, love, sobriety, and heavenly-mindedness. The authority of the heads of the family, and the conversation and example of all the members of it, are powerful inducements to a religious temper and behaviour. As in a well disciplined army, even the cowards are constrained to stand to their arms, and to act violently, by the general order of the whole; so in a religious household, a wicked man can scarcely contrive how to live wickedly, but seems to be almost a saint, by being continually among those who appear to be saints. O how easy and well-paved (if I may use the expression) is the way to heaven in such a gracious society, in comparison of what it is to those who dwell in the houses of the profane and sensual! In the former, the advantages of instruction, authority, example, and conversation, are all on the side of God and religion: in the latter, the same powerful circumstances are all on the side of corrupt nature, and push men forward in the broad way that leads to destruction.

If then you would not be guilty of bringing ruin on immortal souls; if you wish to have the blessing of them who are ready to perish for ever, to come upon you; if you desire that your children and servants should be pious and happy; if you would have your whole domestic society blessed;—let your household be daily consecrated by fervent prayer to Almighty God.—The

4th and *last* advantage of family religion which I shall mention, is its tendency to form an holy church and people, and to propagate religion from generation

to generation. The public state of religion in the world must entirely depend on the care bestowed on the cultivation of it in private families. If the nursery be neglected, how is it possible that the plantation should prosper? Such as the families are, of which congregations, churches, and kingdoms are composed, such will be the flourishing or the decayed state of religion in these larger communities: And consequently it is as clear as noon-day, that the disregard shown to God in our households is the fatal source of that amazing corruption of manners in the present age, which almost every one pretends to lament, but almost none sets himself in earnest to reform. Would you then put a stop to abounding iniquity, and promote the cause of God and religion, begin at home, and let your Maker have that honour in your families to which he is entitled.

Had we, who minister in the public worship of God, only to lay those stones in order in the building, which parents and masters of families had previously polished, how easy and delightful would be our task? how comely and beautiful would our worshipping assemblies appear? how pure and comfortable would their communion be? But if these shall neglect to exert their proper influence; if the work of hundreds or thousands shall be left to be performed by one or two, what a tedious labour must it prove? What effect can divine truths, delivered once a-week, have, unless the impression of them be afterwards kept alive by family-devotion and domestic religion? It is no wonder that a tender plant should wither and die which is seldom visited or watered: and it is as little wonderful, that those should continue wicked and impenitent, who but once a-week come under the influence of a religious ordinance; and who neither see nor hear any thing of God, but when the stated season

of public instruction returns. If religion die in families, how can it live in nations? Is it not an inevitable consequence, that all our public devotions must in this case dwindle away into mere hypocrisy and lifeless, unavailing forms of worship?

I have thus endeavoured to represent to you the manifold advantages which would arise from maintaining the worship of God in your families. And I have now only to add, that though you were willing to be without these advantages, yet this loss is not the whole penalty which must attend the neglect of that duty. This avowed disregard of God will not always pass unpunished. The day is coming, when “God will pour out his fury upon the Heathen that know him not, and upon the families that call not upon his name.”—“Consider this, ye that now forget God, lest he tear you in pieces, when there is none to deliver.”

I would now conclude the subject by pressing you, with all the earnestness of which I am capable, to the performance of this necessary and important duty, were it not that I think it may be of use to consider some of those excuses by which the neglect of it is commonly defended.

Some plead their rank and station in the world, but on what principles I could never yet discover. I cannot conceive any principle of reason more strong and obvious than that uttered by our Saviour, (Luke xii. 48.) “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more.” And certainly if benefits conferred deserve any return, they at least deserve thanks: if God hath placed us in a more distinguished station, we owe to him a more solemn and devout acknowledgment. Riches and honours, instead of setting

a man above the obligation of family-worship, rather bind it more strictly on him: and that it is below no man of any station whatsoever to perform this office, appears by the example in my text; the example of one in the most elevated station known among men, returning from the public worship of God to bless his household.

Others plead, that it has not been the practice of their families, and that they are not inclined to bring a new custom into it. To these I answer, that the reason of this duty is as old as eternity itself, and the practice of it is as ancient as the first family of mankind. In every succeeding age, down to the present day, there have been families in which God was worshipped, and there will be such until the end of the world. Nay, I dare venture to affirm, that there are few now hearing me, whose fathers or grandfathers did not at least maintain the form of this duty. For, however much it is despised now, it is certain, that it was in reputation about an hundred years ago, and generally practised by men of all ranks. It deserves, therefore, to be inquired into, when, or by whom, and for what cause, this good old custom was laid aside? what was the shameful period in which the worship of God was turned out of doors to make way for irreligion, and a contempt of divine things? Then, indeed, a most base and dishonourable innovation was made in your families: and therefore it must be your glory to restore things to their ancient state, and to give the worship of God that room in your houses which it formerly possessed.

But if it be really true, that this important duty has been always neglected in your families, believe me it is now high time to introduce it. Your danger is greater than you are aware of. Punishment loseth nothing by delay; the slower it advances, the heavier it will

prove. And therefore you have reason to fear, that the wrath of God, which has been so long restrained, shall at length break forth with double violence, if it is not prevented by a speedy reformation.

Another excuse, by which some defend their neglect of this duty, is their inability to perform it well. They cannot pray to God in public in so decent a manner as they would incline. In answer to this, I need only observe, that, next to the divine blessing, nothing contributes more to teach men to pray than frequent practice and use. So that, if upon this account you neglect the duty, your inability can pass for nothing else than a feigned pretence to cover your unwillingness; for, were you as willing to learn to pray, as to acquire the knowledge of any art, you would soon by diligent endeavours obtain a competent measure of this excellent gift. Besides, if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath; it is the sincerity of your desires which God regards, and not the expressions with which you clothe them; and if you set about this duty in good earnest, and in the best manner you can, though perhaps you may come short of what you wish, God will both accept and assist you in your humble and well meant attempts to honour him.

Upon the whole, then, may I not hope that you will hearken to what I have said? God is now offering himself to be your guest; and is, by us, demanding an entrance into your hearts and into your houses. And can you resolve on refusing him? Shall the great King of heaven thus stand at your doors and knock, and yet meet with a repulse? If the authority of God has any weight with you; if your reason can prevail with you; if your own immortal souls, or the souls of those who dwell with you, appear worthy of your regard; in a

word, if duty, gratitude, or interest, can move you, all these conspire to enforce my exhortation, and to plead the cause of family-worship. And must these powerful advocates plead in vain? must they turn evidences against you, and appear at last in judgment to condemn you? God forbid. I desire to hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

May the spirit of all grace seal these instructions, and powerfully determine you to the practice of this duty, that, by the exercise of social worship here below, you may be gradually prepared for the more exalted worship of the triumphant society above, who all with one heart, and one voice, ascribe salvation to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever. *Amen.*

SERMON XLVI.

Preached before the Society in Scotland for propagating Christian Knowledge, *January 4, 1784.*

MATTHEW vi. 10.

—*Thy Kingdom come.*—

THE correspondence between heaven and earth is preserved and conducted by Christ alone; “For no man cometh,” or can come, “to the Father but by him.” John xiv. 6. It is he who presents all our homage to God; it is he who transmits to him all our petitions; and by his hands all mercy and grace are conveyed to us.

Our most fervent prayers, the devoutest breathings of our souls, must not only be purged from that defilement which cleaves to them, but even in their greatest purity, they must be offered up in his censer, in order to their acceptance, and can only ascend by the incense of his sacrifice.

It should therefore be our first care, in all our approaches to the throne of grace, to solicit the favour of this powerful Mediator, and to procure his friendly interposition in our behalf; and then we shall have no cause to dread a repulse; for his intercession is, and must be, always prevalent. The dignity of his person, his relation to the Father, and especially the perfection of that sacrifice upon which his intercession is founded, effectually secure acceptance to us; so that if once we are fully persuaded that our requests are framed according to his will, we need have no distrustful anxiety about their success, for he will enforce them with all the merit of his own blood; and therefore we may confidently hope to obtain what we ask, in that time and way which unerring Wisdom sees best for us: "For this," says the apostle John, "is the confidence which we have in the Son of God, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he heareth us, we know that we have the petitions we desired of him." 1 John v. 14, 15.

This, my brethren, is an abundant source of consolation and joy; and though our desires are limited to such things as are agreeable to the will of our Redeemer; yet by this very limitation our comfort is extended, and prayer becomes a privilege of infinitely greater value than otherwise it would be. An unconfined liberty in our addresses to God would, in most cases (to such ignorant and unthinking creatures as we are) amount to noth-

ing better than the choice of the means and manner of our own destruction. (Ecel. vi. 12.) "For who knoweth what is good for a man in this life?" Whereas our glorious High Priest, who is perfectly acquainted with our state, can never be at a loss to know what is good for us; and the costly proofs he hath already given of his mercy and love, leave us no room to suspect his concern for our welfare. The least reflection on his sufferings may easily convince us, that he sincerely intends our happiness, and can disapprove of nothing but what is hurtful to our interest. Neither hath he left it to the uncertain conjectures and doubtful reasonings of our own minds, to find out what is agreeable to him; this is clearly revealed to us in the holy Scriptures: and to render the discovery of it still more easy to us, he hath furnished us with a short but perfect model of devotion in this comprehensive prayer which he taught his disciples; by attending to which, we may learn from his own mouth after what manner we should address the throne of grace, and what ought to be the matter and order of our desires. Hereby the surest foundation is laid for our confidence and hope; and whatever is according to this divine pattern, we may ask with full assurance of faith, being confident that he who hath secured for us all the blessings which we need, will certainly listen to those desires which he himself hath excited and authorised. "And if we know that he heareth us," we may from thence certainly conclude, "that we shall have the petitions we desired of him."

I shall not detain you with any account of the several parts of this excellent prayer, nor the particular design for which our Lord introduced it in this sermon: Only, to make way for the instructions I propose to lay before you on this occasion, I shall observe in general,

That prayer is not only an acknowledgment of our dependance upon God for the blessings we ask, but it likewise imports a sincere resolution on our part to put ourselves in the way of those blessings, and to use all proper means for obtaining them. Thus, when we pray for daily bread, we do not mean, that God should indulge our idleness, and feed us in a miraculous way; but only, that he would countenance our honest endeavours, and prosper them by his blessing, which alone maketh rich. In like manner, when we pray, as in my text, that the kingdom of God may come, we certainly intimate our own consent to be employed as instruments in carrying on this design, and must be understood as binding and obliging ourselves, by this petition, to do every thing in our sphere that may contribute to promote it.

Accordingly, I shall endeavour, in dependance upon the divine aid,

First. To explain and illustrate the petition itself. And,

Secondly. To show what may reasonably be expected from us in consequence of our using it. Or rather indeed, what is absolutely necessary to prove that we are sincere, when we thus pray “thy kingdom come.”

It is scarcely to be supposed, that any who read their Bibles, can be ignorant of what is here meant by the kingdom of God. This form of speech was very common among the Jews, especially about the time of our Saviour’s appearance; and was used by them, to signify that grand revolution foretold in ancient prophecy which was to be brought about by the Messiah, their long expected king. Thus we find the Pharisees (Luke xvii. 20.) inquiring “when the kingdom of God should come;” that is, as the context explains it, when the reign

of the Messiah should commence. And John the Baptist proclaimed the approach of this glorious Person in the same style; saying, “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matth. iii. 2. There are several other passages in the New Testament, where the same phrase occurs; from which it doth still more plainly appear, that by the “kingdom of God” is meant the gospel-dispensation, in which subjects were to be gathered to God by his Son as the reconciling Mediator, and by him formed into a church or spiritual kingdom, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail; which is to subsist on earth, and enlarge itself in spite of all opposition, till at length it shall become perfect in heaven, and triumph in eternal glory.

Now, this kingdom is either External, comprehending all who make an open profession of faith in Christ, and submit to the ordinances which he hath instituted; or Internal, consisting in that dominion which he exercises over the hearts of his subjects, converting them by his grace to the faith and obedience of the gospel, enlightening their minds, renewing their wills, and purifying their affections; filling them with “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;” that is, with true Christian virtue, and all the blessed fruits and effects of it. And no doubt the petition respects both these views of the kingdom of God: for though the last, *viz.* the dominion of grace in the heart, or the dominion of God within us, is beyond comparison the most valuable of the two, and therefore chiefly to be desired by us; yet, as the kingdom is introduced and established by means of the ordinances which Christ hath appointed, we ought likewise to be much concerned for the preservation and enlargement of the visible church, or that external king-

dom within which these ordinances are dispensed, and to pray for the one in order to the other.

So that this petition may be considered as directing us to pray for these following things :

1st. That the gospel may be propagated throughout the world, and all nations brought to the knowledge of the only true God, and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

It appears from the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, that no less than universal dominion was promised to the Lord Redeemer. “Ask of me,” says God, (Psal. ii. 8.) “and I shall give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” It was foretold, (Psal. lxxii. 8, 11, 17.) “That his dominion should reach from sea to sea, and from the rivers to the ends of the earth ; yea, that all kings should bow down before him, and all nations should serve him ; that men should be blessed in him, and all nations call him blessed.” And that remarkable passage (Dan. vii. 13, 14.) is a clear and express declaration on this head. “I saw,” says the Prophet, “in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him ; and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him.” Now, it is evident, that the extent of his kingdom doth not yet equal these magnificent descriptions of it. There are still many dark corners of the earth upon which the Sun of Righteousness hath never arisen ; others, which were once visited with his healing and comforting light, have had their candlestick long removed ; and the Jews, whose return to their own Messiah shall so remarkably enrich the church, and give such

life and beauty to it, that Paul compares it to a “resurrection from the dead,” (Rom. xi. 15.) do still retain their prejudice against him, and obstinately refuse subjection to him.

We ought therefore to pray that the gospel, which hitherto has been confined within very narrow bounds, may gradually spread and extend itself on every side, till at length it obtain possession of the whole earth, and “all the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God, and of his Christ.” Rev. xi. 15.—But,

2dly. We are more especially to pray for a divine blessing to accompany the means of grace,

That the gospel may come to men, not in word only, but also in power, and prove effectual for turning “them from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” That where Christ doth already reign in his external ordinances, there he would also erect his throne in the hearts of men, subduing sinners to himself, and training up his saints, by the influences of his holy Spirit, to a meetness for that undefiled inheritance which he hath purchased for them. And,

3dly. We are likewise authorised by this petition to pray, that whatever stands in opposition to the kingdom of our Redeemer, either with respect to the extent or influence of it, may be removed out of the way:

Particularly, that Antichrist, that “man of sin and son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God,” (2 Thess. ii. 3, 4.) and hath long been “drunk with the blood of the saints,” (Rev. xvii. 6.) may be brought to the ground, and never arise any more: that the delusions of the false prophet, and blasphemous impostor Mahomet, which have overspread so great a part of the world, may at length be detected, and his kingdom of darkness and violence plucked up by the roots.

And though it doth not belong to us to choose the time, or means, or manner of doing it, for these must be wholly submitted to Him “who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working;” yet surely it is lawful for us, to desire in general, “that God would arise and scatter all his enemies,” (Psal. lxviii. 1.): and even to make mention of those enemies in particular whom he hath described in Scripture by such plain and legible characters, that we can be in no danger of mistaking them; and to plead, that what he hath purposed and spoken concerning them may be fulfilled in the most speedy and effectual manner. In a word, whatever is conducive to the present glory of the Redeemer, and the prosperity of his kingdom upon earth, may justly be comprehended in this petition; and it will never cease to be of use in the church, till all the Redeemer’s enemies are made his footstool; and then it shall be exchanged for that triumphant song, (Rev. xii. 10.) “Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ. Alleluia! for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” Rev. xix. 6, 7.

Thus have I endeavoured to give you a short account of the sense and import of this petition.—Let us now proceed, in the

Second place, To consider more largely what may reasonably be expected from us in consequence of our using it; or rather, indeed, what is absolutely necessary to prove that we are sincere when we thus pray, “Thy kingdom come.”—And,

1st. It is necessary that we should become the subjects of this kingdom, not in name only, but in deed and

in truth, otherwise we cannot wish the prosperity and advancement of it.

This King of Zion, who sways a sceptre of grace over those who cordially submit to him, is likewise armed with a rod of iron, to dash in pieces his obstinate enemies; and therefore, to all such, his coming must be most terrible; and neither their inclination nor interest will suffer them to desire it. No man can wish the increase of a power which he knows to be opposite to him, especially when the opposition is so great, and the difference so irreconcilable, as that which subsists between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan; for the one must necessarily be built upon the ruins of the other.

Let us then, my brethren, throw down the weapons of our rebellion, and yield ourselves to this gracious Sovereign; and then the increase of his power shall become the matter of our joy. Let us invite him into our hearts, and erect a throne for him there; or rather, let us beseech him to erect one for himself, to cast down every thing within us that would exalt itself against his authority, and to take the full and perpetual possession of our souls. Let us unfeignedly accept of him, in the whole extent of his office as Mediator; that standing related to him as the members of his body, we may derive from him wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and every thing necessary to our complete redemption. Let us secure to ourselves a title to the protection and privileges of his government, by submitting to the laws and constitutions of it; and then it will become easy and natural to us, to pray for the prosperity of a kingdom to which we belong, and the glory of a Sovereign who employs all his power and authority for our good.—A

2d Duty incumbent upon us, in consequence of our using this petition, is to endeavour, by all the methods

we can, to persuade others likewise to become the subjects of this kingdom.

Many indeed call Christ, "Lord, Lord; but few," alas! "do the things which he says:—they profess that they know God, while in works they deny him,—being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate." And shall not this move our pity and compassion? Can we look around us, even within the limits of the visible church, and see human nature exposed in every deformed and sickly shape? Can we behold multitudes of men, who are called by the name of Jesus, counteracting the most sacred obligations of conscience, and even pouring contempt upon the only Saviour of lost sinners? Can we see all this, I say, and not afford our helping hand? Do we pray that the kingdom of God may come, and will we do nothing to introduce it into the hearts of others, who by nature are less disposed to entertain it than we ourselves once were? If we are sincere in using this petition, let us show our sincerity by our endeavours to obtain what we ask. Let us labour, with all our might, to awaken poor sinners to a sense of their danger, that they may fly to the protection of that merciful Saviour, who hath expressly said, "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." John vi. 37.

Various are the means which may be used for this purpose: I shall mention one, which all of us may employ, and that is a holy and exemplary life. There is grandeur and majesty in the image of God, which exacts homage to itself from every heart. There is something within us, which, in spite of our degeneracy, confesses and approves of what is right; truth in our speech; justice and honesty in our commerce with others; patience under affliction, and pity to the afflicted; a generous contempt of the world, and a readiness to do good

to all. These are virtues which the worst of men secretly honour, and the practice of them explains them better, and enforces them more, than words can do. Would we then prevail with men to become Christians indeed, let us draw out Christianity in our lives, and make it visible to their eyes, and it will speak for itself more intelligibly and convincingly than we can do: for men, by beholding it, will see at once, that it is not only excellent, but, by the grace of God, practicable too. 'This is an argument that hath more persuasion in it than any other can have; and then it is recommended to us by our Lord himself, (Matth. v. 16.) "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

3dly. If we sincerely desire the prosperity and advancement of Christ's external kingdom, we will manifest this by our endeavours to support and maintain it where it is already established, especially among ourselves.

This is an evidence which may reasonably be expected from us; and indeed without it, all our professions of love to the Redeemer, and of zeal for his glory, must pass for vain and flattering pretences, which deserve no credit. We only mock God, when we pray that the religion of his Son may become universal, and fill the whole earth, if at the same time we do not discover, by our conduct, a hearty concern for its continuance in our own land; yea, if we do not actually resist and oppose all attempts whatever to carry it away from us.

It hath pleased God to distinguish us by our religious privileges above most other nations in the world. They were purchased by our fathers, with the expense of much blood and treasure; and it would be highly criminal in us to resign them tamely, but far more to throw

them away with our own hands: yet forgive me to say, that they are chargeable with a crime not less than this, who either openly attempt, or secretly wish, to bring one to the throne of these kingdoms, whose principles oblige him to pull down what we apprehend to be the kingdom of Christ, and to carry us back to that anti-christian slavery, from which we have so happily escaped.

There is such a manifest inconsistency between this petition and the practice of such people, that it is surprising they do not observe it; and it must appear still more wonderful, when we consider that the persons who are chiefly chargeable with this inconsistency among us, cannot be supposed ignorant of the meaning of this excellent prayer, which, by their ordinances, they oblige themselves to use so frequently, and even press as a necessary form upon others. But surely to pronounce the words of it cannot be of such efficacy as to atone for actions which contradict the sense of it; nor indeed do I suppose that they expect this from it. I rather believe, that inveterate prejudice and strong delusion hinder many of them to perceive this obvious inconsistency.

But let us, my brethren, “stand fast in that liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not suffer ourselves to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” Let us show our sincerity in using this petition, by resisting all attempts to remove the candlestick from among ourselves; let us bless God for the religious privileges we enjoy, and not suffer them to be violently wrested out of our hands, under any pretence whatever: let us not even expose them to the smallest danger, but guard them as the most valuable part of our property; and especially, let us be careful so to improve them, that we may never provoke God himself to deprive us of them.—In the

4th and *last* place, Let us extend our regards to those dark and miserable corners of the earth, which are full of the habitations of cruelty and wickedness.

Let us not only pray, that the gospel may be sent to them ; but let us do what we can to make our prayers effectual, by embracing every opportunity which the providence of God affords us, of conveying to them this inestimable blessing. It is our honour and happiness to have a Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge erected among us by royal letters patent, (and countenanced by an annual donation from his majesty of 1000 pounds Sterling) whose business it is to attend to this very thing. The progress they have already made, is at once a convincing proof of their fidelity, and a manifest token of the divine favour and acceptance ; hitherto, indeed, their pious endeavours have been mostly laid out in the remote and barbarous parts of our own native land, though they have not been wholly confined to these. They have been enabled to employ some missionaries abroad ; of whose success among the Indians, especially of late, they have received such agreeable accounts, as gives the delightful prospect of a large accession to the kingdom of our Redeemer. The fields are already growing white in those parts, and promise a rich and plentiful harvest, were more labourers employed to gather it.

Here then is an opportunity, which God, in his Providence, affords us of obtaining the answer of our own prayer. By this Society, he demands a proof of our sincerity, and, as it were, offers us the honour to become fellow-workers with himself in gaining new subjects to his Son. Let us with thankfulness embrace the offer, and contribute as liberal an assistance as we can for carrying on this glorious design.

You must all be sensible, that your substance cannot be employed to a better purpose, nor indeed laid out in a way more truly advantageous to yourselves. This is charity to the souls of men, and, in the noblest sense, “lending to the Lord,” (Prov. xix. 17.) who will not fail to repay with usury.

This is a certain way of laying “up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where there is no corrupting moth nor rust, and where thieves cannot break through to steal.” What is thus devoted to the immediate service of the Redeemer, can never be lost to the giver, but shall descend in showers of blessings upon his own head. “The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he who watereth shall be watered also himself.” Prov. xi. 25.

Such liberality will afford us, in the mean time, a most refined and delicate pleasure; an enjoyment not confined to a day, but which lives and improves by reflection: and then it shall be amply recompensed at the resurrection of the just, (Dan. xii. 3.) “When they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many unto righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.”

Yea, this will bring down the blessing of God upon our land; the vigorous prosecution of this noble design will be a better defence to us than the most potent fleets or numerous armies, as it will engage the Lord of Hosts on our side, “who will be a wall of fire about us, and the glory in the midst of us.”

But I hope I need not multiply arguments to persuade you to so reasonable a duty: the glory of the Redeemer, the salvation of precious and immortal souls, our own present and eternal interest, all unite their force in exciting us to it. Let us then, whilst we pray “Thy king-

dom come," do every thing in our sphere that may contribute to promote it; and then shall we triumph in eternal glory, when the body of Christ shall be completed. *Amen.*

SERMON XLVII.

Preached Dec. 12, 1776, being the first public Fast after the Commencement of the American War.

PSALM li. 18.

Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

THERE is an advice becoming the wisdom of Solomon (in Eccl. v. 2.) "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God; for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." To pray to the Most High God is a very solemn thing, even when we view him as seated on a throne of mercy. He is always present with us, whether we think of him or not: but when we pray, we, by our own deed, place ourselves in his sight, and solicit his attention. And is not this a very solemn and awful thought? We speak to one who looks immediately into the heart, and who requireth "truth in the inward parts." Nay, we appeal to him as the Searcher of hearts, for the truth of every word which we utter before him, and challenge his omniscience to take cogni-

zance, whether what we say doth not express the real sentiments and desires of our hearts. I say *the desires of our hearts*; for these, and not the language in which we clothe them, are our prayers to God. Nay, the better the words are which we use in prayer, the more insolent is the profanation, if they are not animated by the desires which they ought to express. Too many are apt to imagine, that they have succeeded well in the exercise of devotion, if they have been able to address God by his proper titles, and to recollect those words indited by the Spirit of God, in which holy men of old expressed their desires, and which they committed to writing for the use of the church. But they do not consider, that the very end for which those accepted prayers were recorded, was, to regulate our hearts instead of directing our lips; and that it is our most immediate business, when such petitions occur to our minds, to try our hearts by them, that we may truly feel what they express, before we adventure to present them to God.

It is the character of hypocrites, whom God abhorreth, that they “draw near to him with their mouths, and honour him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him.” This is to add abuse and insult to all their other sins; and those prayers which have proceeded from feigned lips, will, in the great day of judgment, stop the mouths of transgressors more effectually, than all the other offences with which they shall be found chargeable.

The articles of a man’s belief may not always be present to his mind; or at least the practical inferences which may justly be drawn from them, may not be all so obvious as to command his uniform attention. To counteract indeed a plain and positive law, is such a flagrant rebellion as admits of no excuse: and yet even in this case,

the sinner may pretend to plead, in alleviation of his crime, that the law appeared to him so strict and rigorous, that he could not bring his mind to consent to its demands.

But what evasion can a man find for contradicting his own prayers? Or what shall he be able to answer, when God shall say to him, “Out of thine own mouth do I condemn thee, thou wicked servant?” Every request which we make to God, is not only an explicit declaration that we highly esteem, and ardently desire the benefits we ask, but likewise implies an obligation on our part, to put ourselves in the way of receiving what we ask, and to use all the means in our own power to obtain it. When therefore we do not endeavour to obtain the blessings which we ask, we plainly declare that we do not heartily desire them. And by asking what we do not desire to obtain, we make it evident that we are presumptuous dissemblers, who use greater freedom with the all-perfect Being, than we dare to use with any of our fellow mortals, who is possessed of sufficient power to resent such unworthy and abusive treatment.

I have just now read to you a prayer of the royal Psalmist, which none of us, I suppose, will hesitate to adopt. It consists of two distinct petitions; the one respecting the spiritual, the other the temporal prosperity of the people over which the providence of God had placed him. And it will readily occur to you, that both these important interests of the nation to which we belong, are recommended to our attention in the royal proclamation which hath brought us together this day. What I propose in the following discourse is to make a few remarks,

First. On the matter of David’s prayer.

Secondly. On the order observed in the petitions contained in it.

Thirdly. On the temper of mind with which this prayer appears to have been accompanied. I will then shew what is incumbent on those who address the same requests to God, in order to prove the uprightness of their hearts, and that they sincerely wish to obtain what they ask.

I begin with the matter of David's prayer: "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem."

The first of these petitions hath an obvious reference to the tribes of Israel, considered in their spiritual state, as a religious community, or the true church of God. To those who are acquainted with the language of Scripture, it will not be needful to prove, that this is the common acceptance of the term *Zion*, when it is used in distinction from *Jerusalem*. *Zion* was the unalterable station of the tabernacle, the city of *David*, and the emblem of that spiritual kingdom which *David's Son* and *Lord* was to erect in future times. The blessing prayed for by the *Psalmist* is, that it would please *God* to do good unto *Zion*.

This short, but comprehensive request, in the mouth of a British and protestant Christian, includes more particulars than the limits of one discourse will permit me to enumerate. I shall select a few leading petitions, in which all who come under this description will cordially unite; namely, That *God*, of his infinite mercy, may establish and perpetuate what his own right hand wrought for us in the days of our fathers, at the two illustrious æras of the reformation from popery, and what is justly styled the *Glorious Revolution*: That the word of the *Lord* may have free course, and be glorified in these lands, as long as the sun and moon endure: That the great truths of the gospel of *Christ* may be faithfully

published, and successfully defended, both against the attacks of open enemies, and the secret artifices of those who lie in wait to deceive: That the ordinances of religion may not only be dispensed in purity, but may be accompanied with power, and rendered effectual for the conviction of sinners, and for building up saints in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation: That the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end, and the just be established: That the spirit of division may cease, and that the whole multitude of believers may be of one heart and one soul, “following after the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another.” In fine, that our Zion may be a “quiet habitation, and a tabernacle that shall not be taken down, none of the stakes whereof shall be removed, neither any of the cords broken: that God may appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks to her, and be himself the glory in the midst of her;” “Clothing her priests with righteousness, that all her saints may shout aloud for joy.” In these, and such particulars, consisteth the good of Zion. “Christ loved his church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word; that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; that it might be holy and without blemish.” For this end he lived, and for this end he died, “That he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”

The other petition contained in the text, “build thou the walls of Jerusalem,” hath a reference to the civil state of the Jews as a commonwealth or kingdom, and is a prayer for their national safety and prosperity.

This request, like the former, comprehends a great variety of particulars.

It will be readily admitted, that a form of government, by which the natural rights of men are most effectually secured, and in which the impartial administration of established laws guards the life, the liberty, and the property of the meanest individual, may, without straining the metaphor, be included in the idea of walls and bulwarks, which contribute at once to the defence and ornament of a city. With regard to the “walls or bulwarks” of our civil constitution, it gives me pleasure to acknowledge, that they are not only entire, but in several respects more fair and durable than those of any other nation upon earth. In other lands, the walls of government are built on the surrender of some of the most precious rights of human nature: But in this happy country, we have not bought the protection of government at so dear a rate; nor is the hard hand of the oppressor either felt or feared by the meanest member of the community. And must not the heart of that man then be hard and unfeeling, who doth not wish and pray that such an invaluable constitution may be built up and preserved entire to the latest generations?

But the expression used in the text, calls upon us to look with weeping eyes and sorrowful hearts, upon that awful rent in the British empire, which is the immediate occasion of our meeting together at this time. We have seen a cloud rise out of the west, at first no bigger than a man’s hand; but, like that which the Prophet’s servant saw, it hath overspread the face of heaven, and carried tempest and desolation in its progress. When I mention this great calamity, I do not mean to fix your attention on it as an object which presents nothing to our view but complicated distress and danger. Much as I disapprove of that levity which “despiseth the chastening of the Lord,” I am yet no friend to that despon-

dency which would make us “faint when we are rebuked of him.” The same expression in my text, which reminds us of the alarming breach which we deplore, doth at the same time lead us to look beyond and above it, to him who is able to repair it; to that God who “hath the hearts of all men in his hands, and turneth them as the rivers of water.” With him it is a small matter, not only to fill up the gap which hath separated Great Britain from her American colonies; but if it seem good in his sight, he can, with infinite ease, make this temporary separation the occasion and the means of establishing a firm and permanent union; an union which neither political artifice, nor selfish ambition, nor the pride of independence, will be able to dissolve. This is the desirable issue to which our wishes may lawfully direct us, when we pray, in the language of the royal Psalmist, “Build thou the walls of Jerusalem.”

Having made these remarks on the import of David’s requests, let us attend, in the

Second place, To the order in which they are placed. He begins with praying for the good of Zion, and then offers his supplication in behalf of Jerusalem. Nor is this an accidental or arbitrary arrangement. The same subordination of temporal to spiritual blessings, is uniformly observed through the whole of the sacred record, both in the promises of God, and in the accepted prayers of his people: and it deserves our notice, that, in this order, we are called upon by his majesty’s proclamation to conduct the devotional exercises of this day. For, previous to any particular request respecting the political state of the British empire, we are admonished by our gracious sovereign, “To humble ourselves before Almighty God on account of our sins; to implore his pardon, and to send up, in the most devout and solemn

manner, our prayers and supplications to the divine Majesty, for averting those heavy judgments which our manifold sins and provocations have most justly deserved.”

It may be remembered by some now present, that in the year 1759, when Great Britain sat as queen among the nations, we were called together by a proclamation from the throne, to return public thanks to Almighty God, for the great and public blessings which enriched and distinguished that memorable year.

It was then my object, to warn my fellow citizens against the criminal abuse of our national felicity, by perverting, into weapons of rebellion against God, the fruits of that success with which he had been pleased to favour us.

Since that time we have enjoyed a period of very uncommon prosperity as a kingdom. While riches have been flowing to us from all quarters, luxury and dissipation advancing with an equal pace, have proved at once the propriety and the neglect of that warning. Enormous fortunes, suddenly acquired in our foreign settlements, have accelerated that corruption of manners, which is the usual concomitant of prosperity. Successful adventurers, coming home with sums almost beyond the calculation of a moderate mind, produce a disdain of the slow and sober paths of industry: and “men hastening to be rich fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown them in destruction and perdition.” Our table hath indeed become our snare; and the uncommon blessings conferred on us, instead of heightening our gratitude, have only caused us to forget the hand that bestowed them, and proved the means of alienating our hearts from God.

For this abuse of prosperity, the land doth mourn

this day. They must be blind indeed, who do not see the uplifted hand of God, and even read, on the rod with which he hath smitten us, our national guilt engraved in such deep and legible characters, that it may be truly said, "Our own wickedness hath corrected us, and our backslidings have reprovèd us."

Do we complain of the ingratitude of our American colonies, which flourished so long, and prospered so much in a state of union with the mother-country, and as the free subjects of a free state? In what words can we utter our complaints more expressive than those which are preoccupied, if I may so speak, by the great Lord of heaven and earth, in that solemn appeal which is recorded (Isaiah i. 2.), "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." So that the very expressions with which we would naturally reproach our rebellious colonists, may justly remind us of that more aggravated rebellion, wherewith we ourselves are chargeable against that God, who hath not only planted, but cherished and protected us in a good land unto this day.

Now, whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. God is always the same. He is in one mind, and none can turn him. His love to righteousness, and his hatred of sin, are both unchangeable: and therefore, the truth of that assertion must be equally unchangeable, that righteousness exalteth a nation; whereas sin is the reproach, and without repentance must, in the issue, be the ruin of any people. Would we then pray with acceptance for the peace and prosperity of our Jerusalem, let us begin with praying for the good of Zion; that it may please God to pour down the spirit of

repentance and reformation on men of every rank. Until we thus turn to God, solid prosperity will not return to our land. There may be gleams of transient success: but these interruptions of calamity will only aggravate our final doom. Whereas if we sincerely repent of our evil ways, and return to that God from whom we have revolted, he will stay his hand, now lifted up in wrath, “and God, even our own God, shall bless us.”—“Behold the hand of the Lord is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear; but our iniquities have separated between us and our God.” We have a most gracious and explicit promise to encourage us, (Jerem. xviii. 7, 8.) “At what instant, (saith God) I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

Here then is a large field, in which every man may labour for the good of his country. In this view, the meanest subject has the consolation to think, that he may become useful to the community with which he is connected. The meanest subject may so order his life and conversation, as to render himself, in the eyes of his Maker, one of the “excellent ones of the earth,” one of that “holy seed which is the substance of the land.” The meanest subject may put up the fervent supplications of a pious, pure, and humble soul, to the throne of grace; and with that holy ardour, which alone will find acceptance, solicit the Supreme Disposer of all events, for blessings and benefits of every kind to his country. The meanest subject can “walk with God” in the duties of devotion, can display the beauty of holiness, and stir up others to imitate the example of his virtue and piety.

Thus far I have considered both the matter and order of the two petitions in my text.—The

Third thing proposed was, To make some practical observations on the temper of mind with which they appear to have been accompanied. And it is obvious, in general, that David had a just impression of his absolute dependance on God, and that he did not trust in the arm of flesh, but looked for help from God alone. No man possessed larger measures than David, either of political wisdom or warlike skill; but he did not confide in his own talents for building or defending the walls of Jerusalem: He knew, as he expresseth it in another of his Psalms, that “except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; and except the Lord watch the city, the watchman walketh in vain.” He therefore looks directly to the God of Zion, and commits Jerusalem, and her walls, to his keeping, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, even the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary.

The form of his address doth likewise discover the deep conviction he had of his own unworthiness. He pleads with God, as a humble suppliant, with that penitent and contrite heart, of which he speaks in the verse preceding my text. He claims nothing upon the terms of justice, but applies solely to the mercy and free favour of God. “Do good,” saith he, “*In thy good pleasure, unto Zion.*”

This expression may be further considered, as denoting that submissive and resigned frame of spirit with which he puts up his requests both for Zion and Jerusalem. He did not presume to limit the Holy One of Israel; but left it entirely to his own wisdom and goodness, to grant the matter of his prayer at what time, and in what manner, or by what means, he should choose.

In all these respects, he presents to our view an approved example for our imitation in similar circumstances.

It now only remains that I should inquire, what is incumbent on those who adopt the Psalmist's prayer, in order to prove the uprightness of their hearts, and that they sincerely wish to obtain what they ask.

I observed, in the introduction to this discourse, that every request which we make to God, is not only an explicit declaration that we highly esteem, and ardently desire, the benefits which we pray for, but doth likewise imply an obligation and promise on our part to use all the means in our power to obtain them.

As to what concerns the public state of the nation, and the means of building up and cementing the walls of our Jerusalem, these matters I leave to those who have the constitutional charge of them. The best aid I can contribute in my sphere, is to pray for wisdom to direct the public counsels, and to do what I can for the good of Zion; and in this you all may and ought to be workers together with me. If, then, we have any love for our country, or any sincere desire of saving her from impending calamity, let us now form hearty and vigorous resolutions of correcting and amending our ways. Let our reformation begin in those points from which our corruption may be traced. Remember, that piety towards God is the best support of all those virtues which form the good man, or the useful citizen. Legislators may devise what regulations they please; but if there is no sense of a God or of a providence among the subjects, they will never be able to execute their plans, or to attain their ends. Let personal reformation, therefore, be our first care; and having given all diligence to make our own calling and election sure, let us, in our respec-

tive stations, join heart and hand to discourage vice in every form, and to promote the interests of pure and undefiled religion in our land. Unless we do this, our national fast, instead of ascending to God with acceptance, will sink down into the measure of national guilt, and will only hasten the execution of that fatal sentence, "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe, the press is full, and the fat overflows, for their wickedness is great." On the other hand, by turning to God through Jesus Christ, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, we may not only avert those heavy judgments with which we are threatened, but on scriptural grounds may take encouragement to hope, that God will return in mercy to Zion, and will yet make our Jerusalem a praise on earth. *Amen.*

SERMON XLVIII.

Preached before the Managers of the Orphan Hospital of Edinburgh, *August 7, 1775.*

1 CORIN. iv. 7.

Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?

IT is not to be supposed, that any person endowed with reason can be in suspense for a moment about an answer to these questions. I am confident that there is not one in this assembly who is not ready to reply, It is God alone who maketh me to differ from any other; and I

have nothing which I did not receive from his bountiful hand. No man who believes that God is, will hesitate to confess, with the apostle James, “that every good gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.” Yet so little attention is paid by the bulk of mankind to the consequences of this commonly acknowledged truth, that I shall make no apology for employing the *first* part of my discourse, in reminding you of the evidence by which it is supported:—I shall *then* lay before you some of those practical lessons, equally obvious and important, which with ease and certainty may be deduced from it:—And *conclude* with that improvement of the subject which hath a more immediate reference to the occasion of our meeting together at this time.

First. I begin with reminding you, that every blessing we possess is the gift of God, and that we have nothing which we did not receive from him.

That this is the case with respect to natural endowments, will readily be admitted. Men are apt enough to boast of the improvement of their faculties; but the faculties themselves are universally acknowledged to be the gifts of God. “There is a spirit in man,” said Elihu in the book of Job, “and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding.” A quick apprehension, a retentive memory, a lively imagination, and other mental powers, these are favours which the great Author of our being dispenseth to whom, and in what measure it pleaseth him; and never was any man so arrogant as to pretend, that he bestowed these qualities upon himself.

It is no less evident, that the light of divine revelation is an additional blessing, which flows immediately from the same fountain of beneficence; according to that grateful acknowledgment of the Psalmist, “He shew-

eth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel: He hath not dealt so with any nation." And we must be sensible, that it is purely owing to "the tender mercy of our God, that the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to us, whose fathers sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Nay, we are taught, that the virtue and efficacy of this external light must be wholly attributed to the blessing of God. This is plainly and strongly asserted at the 6th and 7th verses of the preceding chapter: "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase."—"It pleased God," saith our Apostle, speaking of himself, (Gal. i. 15.) "who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me." And in another part of his writings, "By the grace of God I am what I am." Nor did these expressions of humility take their rise from the peculiar circumstances of his own conversion; for he applies the same principle to the Christians at Corinth, and urgeth it as an argument against every degree of boasting or self-attribution, (1 Cor. i. 26. &c.) "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." And then adds, "But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righte-

ousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Were it necessary to descend to other particulars that might be named, it would be easy to show, that all our advantages, of what kind soever, whether they belong to the body or outward estate, are equally derived from God, and dependant upon him. Hear what God said to Moses, (Exod. iv. 11.) "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or blind? have not I the Lord?" How sublime, and how just were the sentiments which Hannah expressed! (1 Sam. ii. 3. &c.) "Talk no more so exceeding proudly, and let not arrogancy proceed out of your mouth: for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed. The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich; he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory; for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them." And with what humble, but elevated devotion did David, in the height of his prosperity, ascribe all that he possessed to the free bounty of God, when he blessed the Lord, and said before all the congregation of the children of Israel, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven, and in the earth, is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand it is power and might, and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now there-

fore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. O Lord our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thy name, cometh of thine own hand, and is all thine own."

I might quote many other passages to the same purpose; but you have heard enough to satisfy you that I am supported by the highest authority when I say, that all the blessings we possess are the gifts of God, the effects of his free and unmerited liberality.

This doctrine, as I observed in the entrance, hath none of the charms of *novelty* to recommend it. But is it on that account less needful to be insisted upon? Most assuredly it is not. I believe we shall find, upon inquiry, that the most obvious truths are universally the least regarded, and therefore have most need to be frequently brought in view, that men may be constrained to bestow some attention upon them, and to consider the influence they ought to have upon their temper and conduct. I am afraid that we judge of spiritual things in the same absurd manner that we judge of temporal things; I mean, that we put a fanciful value upon them, and do not rate them according to their intrinsic worth and real usefulness.

We see every day, that earthly things are estimated, not by their use, but by their scarcity; insomuch that, in common language, the words *rare* and *precious* are convertible terms; though, in fact, the things that are truly precious, because most necessary, instead of being rare, are scattered abroad with the greatest profusion. Thus doth God dispense temporal benefits; the best, that is, the most useful, are universally given out in

greatest abundance. And it may justly be affirmed, that spiritual blessings are dispensed in the same way. The most comprehensive blessing, the *unspeakable* gift of Jesus Christ, is of all others the most free and liberal, being offered “without money and without price,” to every sinner of mankind, without exception; and actually conferred upon all who, feeling their need of a Saviour, are made willing to receive and rest upon him alone for pardon, and peace, and complete salvation. In like manner, the great rules of duty, and the truths that are best adapted to purify our hearts and reform our practice, are dispersed as it were around us in the greatest plenty and variety. God, who hath appointed our work, hath likewise limited the season for doing it; and therefore, that we may not lose a moment, the most useful and necessary instruments of action are laid so near us, that we need only stretch forth our hand to take hold of them. Were they placed at a distance, the opportunity of acting might frequently pass away before the proper means and instruments were got ready. But such wise and effectual provision is made, that no man shall have it in his power to plead this excuse. If any piece of duty be left undone, it cannot be owing either to the want of a plain rule to direct our conduct, or of sufficient arguments and encouragements to move us to action, but to the inattention, or pride, or stubbornness, of our own hearts.

This affords a glorious display of the wisdom and goodness of our great Lawgiver and Judge. But, alas! we thwart his merciful intentions. Overlooking what is near, we roam abroad in quest of other things, that lie at the remotest distance from us, and have the feeblest influence upon our temper and practice. Such is our folly and perverseness, that, despising the most important

truths, because they are common and obvious, we run away in the vain pursuit of abstruse and intricate speculations, which have no other effect than to puzzle the head, or to warm the imagination, while they leave the heart dark, and cold, and insensible.

To correct this false taste, by recalling men's attention to the most simple and practical truths, ought, in my apprehension, to be the principal aim of a gospel-minister. When these have got full possession of men's hearts, and appear in the fruits of a holy life, then, if we find leisure, we may seek after new discoveries; but surely necessity should have the first disposal of our study and labour. Life is short, and souls are precious; and therefore things of eternal consequence ought in all reason to be preferred. They who choose to gratify the curious, by telling them new and strange things, may indeed raise the reputation of their own *invention*; but they do it upon the ruins of a far more excellent thing, I mean, that *charity* "which vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, and seeketh not her own;" and as they have no higher aim than to serve themselves, it is but just they should be left to reward themselves as they can.

We are commanded in Scripture, to be "*ready* to every good work;" that is, to be in such an habitual posture for service, that with facility we may enter upon action so soon as an opportunity presents itself. But we shall never acquire this promptness and facility, till the mind be furnished with some fruitful principles of action; and the more simple and obvious these principles are, the more readily will they occur to us, and the greater authority and influence will attend them. Of this kind is the proposition I have been endeavouring to illustrate. The truth of it is obvious to the meanest capacity; and yet such is its fruitfulness and energy, that some of the

sublimest duties of the Christian life are virtually included in it, and may with ease and certainty be deduced from it.

To select some of these practical lessons was the second thing proposed ; to which I now proceed.

1st. If all the blessings we possess be the gifts of God, the effects of his free and unmerited bounty, then surely we ought to be *humble*. This is the particular improvement which the Apostle directs us to make of this doctrine in the close of my text : “ Who maketh thee to differ from another ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive ? *Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ?* ”

This reasoning is so plain and simple, that a child may understand it ; and yet so perfectly just, that it will abide the severest trial ; nay, the more accurately it is examined, the stronger will it appear. Did we keep this single principle in our eye, that it is God *who maketh us to differ*, that alone might be sufficient to give a check to our pride, and to inspire us with humility. Did we view all our present advantages as gifts freely bestowed, to which we had no previous title or claim ; then every additional blessing would only remind us of our indigence before we received it ; and the greater and more numerous the benefits conferred upon us were, the greater debtors should we judge ourselves, the more deeply should we feel our dependance upon God, and the less disposed should we be to glory in ourselves.

2dly. From the same principle, and with equal ease and certainty, we may deduce our obligation to *thankfulness* and praise. Humility and gratitude, these kindred graces which constitute the proper temper of a Christian, are inseparable companions. They give mutual aid and support to each other, and both take their

rise from the persuasion of this truth. For how can we think of our kind and unwearied benefactor, who condescends to make us the objects of his care, who daily loads us with his benefits, though he is altogether independent of us, and can neither be enriched by our services, nor impoverished by the want of them; how can we think of him, I say, without the most fervent love and humble gratitude?

3dly. To humility and gratitude, I add *resignation* to the will of God. This was the inference which holy Job drew from the doctrine I have been illustrating: "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also? The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord." Surely if no wrong be done us, we have no right to complain. We ought rather to adore that goodness which at first bestowed the gift, gave us the comfortable enjoyment of it, and continued it with us so long; and to say with the saints of old, when our distress is greatest, "I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth." "Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;" and, "Good is the will of the Lord."

4thly. Did we attend to this truth, we should not dare to employ any means that are unlawful for improving our circumstances, or acquiring the good things that belong to a present world; and even in using the means that are lawful, we should constantly look up to God for success, and implore his blessing upon our honest endeavours; remembering, on the one hand, "that the getting of treasures by lying lips, is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death; and, on the other hand,

that the blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it." Which leads me to observe,

5thly, The importance of enjoying the blessing of God, with all the gifts which his bounty bestows upon us. From this alone ariseth their value, and nothing else can impart to them that sweetness which renders the possession of them truly desirable. Happiness cannot be extracted from the creatures themselves: they are all broken cisterns that can hold no water: "The eye is not satisfied with seeing, neither is the ear filled with hearing."—"He that loveth silver, shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase." Solomon records it as one of the evils he had seen under the sun, namely, "riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt." And he supposeth it a very possible case, that amidst the greatest abundance of earthly things, "a man may all his days eat in darkness, and have much sorrow and wrath with his sickness." How awful is that threatening, (Mal. ii. 2.) "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings?" And when this threatening is executed upon any, then "their table becomes a snare to them; and that which should have been for their welfare becomes a trap," insomuch that their prosperity proves both the occasion and instrument of their destruction: "Whereas the Lord blesseth the habitation of the just;" in consequence whereof, "the little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked." It is a significant saying of David, (Psalm xxxvii. 22.) "Such as be blessed of the Lord shall inherit the earth." They hold their portion of it by a different tenure than other men; they possess it as the children of him who is Lord

of all; and their Father, while he feeds them with food convenient for them, gives them at once the proper enjoyment, and the sanctified use of it. This is the peculiar privilege of believers in Christ Jesus; for “as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in his name.” And as the apostle Paul reasons, “If children, then are they also heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus;” so that, in the most common bounties of Providence, they can taste the sweetness of special love, and may lawfully consider every benefit conferred upon them as a token of their Father’s affection, and a pledge of that fulness of joy that awaits them in a future state. How much then doth it concern us, even as we regard our present comfort, “to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure,” that on every gift, whether small or great, reading the precious name of him who bestows it, we may have the true relish of the provision afforded us in the course of our journey through this strange country, till we arrive at our Father’s house above, where we shall obtain possession of that glorious inheritance of the saints, which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and fadeth not away.

These are a few of the practical lessons, which, with ease and certainty, may be deduced from the doctrine of my text.

PERMIT me now to apply the subject to the particular occasion of our meeting together at this time.

Hitherto I have been speaking of the blessings we possess as gifts freely bestowed. But there is another important light in which we ought likewise to view them. They are talents committed to us for special ends and purposes; and it is both expected and required that we be diligent and faithful in improving them, as it be-

comes those who must one day give an account of their stewardship. There is an essential difference between God's giving to us, and our giving to our fellow-men. We renounce our interest in what we give to another: it ceaseth to be ours, and becomes the property of the person upon whom we bestow it. But God giveth nothing away after this manner. His giving to his creatures doth not make the benefit conferred a whit the less his own than it originally was. God is the entire and absolute proprietor of all things: they are his, because he made them; and what is styled *property* among men, must necessarily be derived, limited, and dependant. This dominion is so essential to God, that he cannot divest himself of it. Earthly rulers may resign part of the jurisdiction that belongs to them. Thus Saul proclaimed, that whosoever should fight Goliath the Philistine, and kill him, "he and his house should be made free in Israel." But no creature can be released from its obligation to serve God; for absolute dependance and unlimited subjection are so intimately connected, that they cannot exist separately. As we necessarily depend upon God, so we are necessarily bound to submit to his authority, and to serve him to the utmost extent of the powers he hath given us. No creature can say of any thing he possesseth, This is fully mine. to dispose of it as I please. The benefits conferred upon us are so far our property, with respect to our fellow-servants, that, unless they can produce an order from the great Master of the family, none of them may take them from us, neither can they righteously possess them without our own consent; but, with regard to God, they still belong to him, and are ours only for the ends and purposes he hath appointed. They were not given merely as an alms to the needy, but as instruments are given

to a servant for doing his Master's work. This is clearly expressed, (1 Peter iv. 10.) "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

The nature of the gifts bestowed upon men, plainly shows, that they were not intended for pomp, but for use; and it appears from the manner in which they are distributed, that none of them are bestowed to gratify the pride of individuals, but to establish such a mutual connexion and dependance, as may render every one in his place useful to the community. We have a lively illustration of this, (1 Cor. xii. 8. *et seq.*) "To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues. But all these worketh that one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will." Thus each hath his distinct office and use, that, as it is expressed, (ver. 25.) "there should be no schism in the body; but that the several members should have the same care one for another," and maintain mutual love, whilst all in their way contribute to the good of the whole. "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee; nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." To every one something is given, to recommend him to the respect of others; and from every one something is withheld, to keep him modest and humble; for God hath so ordered the distribution of his benefits, that each may feel his need of that excellence which he hath not in possession, and at the same time have the aid of those gifts, by the ministry of others, which he himself wants.

“The rich and the poor meet together,” saith Solomon, “the Lord is the maker of them both.” Hence, “he that mocketh the poor” is said “to reproach his Maker;” that is, he throws an injurious reflection upon the wisdom and goodness of divine providence, which hath appointed this inequality of conditions among men, for exercising, on the one hand, the patience and resignation of the poor; and that the rich, on the other hand, may be furnished with constant opportunities of acknowledging their obligations to God, and their dependance upon him for all they possess, by distributing what they can spare from their own necessary uses, for the relief and comfort of their needy brethren. That this is the proper improvement of wealth, and the purpose for which it is bestowed, appears from Paul’s direction to Timothy, (1 Tim. vi. 17.) “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy: that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” And how provoking it is to God, when men abuse the gifts of his providence, we learn from that complaint and threatening, (Hosea ii. 8, 9.) “She did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness.”

The application of these truths to the purpose for which we are at present assembled, is so obvious, that I am confident it must already have occurred to the most

inattentive of my hearers. Were we to consider the good things we possess, merely as gifts freely bestowed, and left entirely to our own disposal; yet gratitude should prompt us to employ them in such a way as might be most acceptable to our kind and generous Benefactor. But I am furnished, you now see, with a more persuasive argument; the plea of gratitude comes enforced with the claim of justice, while regard to our own interest solicits our compliance with their united demands: "For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the deeds done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." In that day, "unto whomsoever much hath been given, of him also much will be required:" and the unprofitable servant, who did not improve the talent committed to him, but buried it under ground, or wrapt it in a napkin, shall be cast "into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Seeing then these things are so, ought we not to reckon it an additional ground of thankfulness to God, when, besides the favours conferred upon us, he is at any time pleased to afford us an opportunity of employing the fruits of his liberality in such a manner as contributes most effectually to answer the highest and most important purposes for which they were bestowed? An opportunity of this kind is just now presented to you by the much-to-be respected Managers of the Orphan Hospital, at whose desire I address you this day. The objects of their care are there placed in your view; and surely to provide for the Christian education of so many helpless children, and for their decent clothing and maintenance, till they be trained up to earn a subsistence for themselves, as it is an exercise of the truest mercy to them, so it cannot fail to be highly acceptable

to that God who disdains not to style himself the Father of the fatherless.

The peculiar excellencies of this species of charity were fully illustrated, on a former occasion of this kind, from that prayer of the Psalmist in behalf of the Jewish nation, (Psal. cxliv. 12.) “That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace*.” Then it was shown, That a permanent provision for the Christian education of destitute children, is a charity which tends to prevent misery; and must therefore be preferable to that which only alleviates present distress, or procures it a short and uncertain relief. This is charity to the souls of our fellow-creatures, and the noblest imitation of Him who came from heaven to earth, to seek and to save that which was lost. Besides, it is a charity which, of all others, is in least danger of being misapplied or defeated. This renders the prospect of doing good by it in the highest degree probable. And then its influence is of the largest extent; for while it serves to advance the glory of God, and the interests of pure and undefiled religion in the world, it promotes at the same time, in the most effectual manner, the spiritual improvement and happiness of individuals, and even the temporal prosperity of the nation to which we belong.

To such powerful recommendations any addition would be superfluous. And they who, influenced by these motives, contribute according to their ability for the support of an institution so pious and salutary, may be assured, that what they give is, in the most proper sense

* Dr. Erskine’s Sermon, preached before the Managers of the Orphan Hospital, at Edinburgh, *May* 18, 1774.

of Solomon's words, "lent to the Lord, and that which they give will he pay them again."

Upon the whole, then, let it be our first care to have our own hearts filled with love to God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father in Christ; for unless this be the source of our charity to others, our beneficence may be profitable to them, but cannot avail ourselves. And if once this principle be deeply rooted in our hearts, then it will become easy and delightful to us, to communicate good to our fellow-men, in obedience to the command of God, and in imitation of his example. Let us always bear in mind "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." Let us consider the uncertainty of all earthly things, and this will dispose us to employ them with greater cheerfulness for the relief and comfort of our needy brethren, before they be taken from us, or we by death be divorced from them. Above all, let us beg of God the influences of his Spirit, which alone can vanquish that selfishness which is the great opposer of charity, and incline our hearts to all those acts of compassion and kindness which adorn our Christian profession, and by their beauty and usefulness engage others to glorify our heavenly Father. *Amen.*

SERMON XLIX.

Preached on a Communion Sabbath.

JOHN x. 11.

*I am the Good SHEPHERD : the Good SHEPHERD giveth
his life for the Sheep.*

THOUGH Christ is in every view precious to them that believe, yet some of the characters which he sustains, presents him to us in a milder light than others, and render him comparatively more lovely and estimable. And amidst the variety of titles given him in Scripture, there is perhaps none more expressive of condescension and grace, than that which he is pleased to assume in my text.

As many of the Jews were shepherds by occupation, language of this description would be obvious to them all. And they who were enlightened by the Spirit of God, would not only perceive the propriety, but likewise relish all the sweetness of this endearing designation.

To us, indeed, an allusion to the pastoral life can hardly appear with equal beauty and strength. Many circumstances of resemblance would strike those who were acquainted with rural affairs, which must necessarily be supposed to escape our observation. But though we cannot trace them all with a critical exactness, yet by the light which the Scriptures afford us, I hope I shall be able to bring as many proofs of our Lord's care and tenderness, as may suffice to illustrate the propriety

of the allusion, and show with what justice this title of the Good Shepherd is claimed by our Redeemer.

I BEGIN with that to which our Lord himself appeals in the text. "I," says he, "am the good Shepherd: the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

It was a signal proof that David gave of his care and tenderness, when he ventured his life for the sake of his sheep, and encountered a bear and a lion in their defence. But though the attempt was hazardous, it was not altogether desperate; he had hope of success, and actually prevailed. Besides, the charge committed to him was his father's property, part of which would one day fall to his own share: so that his personal interest was connected with the preservation of it; for if the flock decreased, his part of the inheritance would have been diminished in proportion.

But our blessed Lord had no inducement of this nature. His interest was in no shape connected with our welfare; his glory and happiness were independent of us. He could neither be enriched by our homage, nor impoverished by the want of it. Besides, we had forfeited all title to his protection, and, by the most wicked and unprovoked rebellion, had rendered ourselves the objects of his just displeasure. Yet such was his free and unmerited goodness, that he not only hazarded his life in our behalf, but voluntarily resigned it, that we might live through him. "All we like sheep had gone astray," says the evangelical prophet, "we had turned every one to his own way." But "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities;" or, in the language of the New Testament, "He who knew no sin" became a sin-offering for us; the just One suffered for the unjust, "that he might bring us to God."

Had our case been merely unfortunate, like that of a

weak and harmless lamb seized by a lion, whom it could neither resist nor avoid, pity might have inclined a generous heart to attempt something for our deliverance. But our misery was the effect, not of weakness, but of voluntary wickedness. We chose it in its cause. We sinned, though we were forewarned that death would be the issue. We were not caught by surprise, but deliberately surrendered, or rather sold, ourselves to the adversary. Yet in this situation, when we had nothing to invite, far less to deserve, his regard and affection, did the blessed Jesus fly to our relief; and descending from the throne, put on the form of a servant, that in our place he might suffer and die on this earth which he had made.

Besides, the fatal deeds which forfeited our happiness were sins committed directly against himself. It was his own law we transgressed, his own royalty we invaded; we fought against him with his own arms, and joined in confederacy with his most inveterate enemies. So that every obstacle that can be imagined lay in the road of mercy; the blackest ingratitude, the most outrageous insolence; in a word, all the circumstances were united which could aggravate our guilt, and inflame the wrath of him against whom we sinned; and conspired to render our punishment not only a righteous, but even a wise and necessary exercise of severity, for vindicating the honour of the Sovereign, and for maintaining the credit and influence of his government. Nay, as the threatening was published before the penalty was incurred, truth as well as justice demanded the execution of it.

Such were our circumstances, when this Friend of sinners, but the enemy of sin, came upon the wings of love to save us. "Deliver them," said he, "from going

down to the pit," and against me let the sword of justice be unsheathed. Here was goodness, generous, disinterested goodness, that never had, and that never can have, a parallel. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die;" but who hath ever heard of one dying for an enemy? Or if such a prodigy could be found among men, yet the generosity even of this person would fall infinitely short of the example in my text. Such a one might be said to resign a life; but then it is a precarious, dependant life; a debt payable on demand; a lease revocable at pleasure. A mere creature can give away nothing that is properly his own, because he has nothing but what he received. Whereas our dearest Lord not only died in the room of enemies, but by dying resigned a life that, in the strictest sense, was his property: for so he says in the 18th verse of this chapter, "I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it up again." He had an estate of his own, (so to speak) an original, and therefore an absolute right to his life. This, as it gave merit and efficacy to his death, so it qualified him to exhibit that mystery of love, which angels contemplated with increasing wonder, when he assumed our nature, and became our Shepherd, and in that character gave his life for the sheep.

But did the blessed Jesus stop here? Did he merely restore sinners to a capacity of happiness, by expiating their guilt, and paving the way for their return to God? Or, to carry forward the allusion, does the good Shepherd satisfy himself with rescuing his sheep from the jaws of the lion, and then leave them to their own conduct, to find the road back to the fold from whence they had strayed? No—For in the

2d place, He also becomes their Guide; and, as it

is beautifully expressed in the 23d Psalm, "He leads them in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."

How amiable does he appear when introduced by Ezekiel, speaking after this manner: "Behold I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out: as a shepherd seeketh out his flock, so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was broken, and strengthen that which was sick." Of the same mild and gracious import is that tender representation in the prophecy of Isaiah: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom and gently lead them that are with young." In allusion to these prophetical descriptions of the Messiah, our Lord himself hath declared in the New Testament, that, "the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." And having in this chapter assumed the title of a Shepherd, he says in the 16th verse, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice."

And indeed this exercise of his pastoral office is no less necessary than it is kind; for such is the enmity of our hearts, such the perverseness of our natures, that after all he has done without us, to bring us to God, yet if his spirit did not work within us, none of us would ever think of returning to him. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Accordingly Paul reminds the converts at Ephesus, that till Christ quickened them, they too were "dead in trespasses and sins, and children of wrath even as others." Hear the language of our Lord to his disciples of every tribe of men, "Ye have not cho-

sen me, but I have chosen you:" and that assertion of the Apostle which is universally true, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." And does he not merit the designation of a good Shepherd, who not only saves his flock from destruction, and opens to them the door of his sheepfold, but goes after them into the wilderness, pursues them whilst they are flying from their own happiness, and never gives over his search till he finds them, and then leads them in safety to a place of rest, where every thing is provided that their necessities require? For this is a

3d proof of his love to his sheep: Having brought them into his fold, he supplies all their wants, and feeds them with food convenient for them. How sweetly did David sing under the sense of this privilege, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want: he maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters." "The young lions may lack and suffer hunger, but they that fear the Lord shall not lack any good thing." "I will feed them," (said God by the prophet Ezekiel, chap. xxxiv. 14.) "I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel." Here peace and affluence are represented in the most striking and agreeable colours. And that this promise has a spiritual meaning, and extends to the gospel church, appears from verse 23d, where the Messiah, under the well-known title of David, is brought fully into view, as the person by whose hand these blessings are dispensed. "I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David, he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David a prince

among them: I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them, and the places round about my hill, a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season: there shall be showers of blessing. And I will raise up for them a Plant of Renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land.” It is not improbable that our Lord had this prophetic description in his eye, when he said in the 9th verse of this chapter, “I am the door (of the sheep:) by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.” But how must it amaze us, to hear from his own lips, that he is not only the door by which the sheep enter into the pasture, but is himself the pasture upon which they feed; yet these are his words, in the 6th chapter of this gospel, at the 51st and following verses: “I am the bread of life, the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world: Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life: for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” Nay, is not this precious food to be dispensed to us this day, in the holy sacrament, under the significant emblems of bread and wine, when the good Shepherd shall say, and say it with power, to those who believe in him, and know his voice, “Take and eat; this is my body broken for you; and this cup is the New Testament in my blood; drink ye all of it.” I suppose I need not inform you, that these

expressions are figurative. You have long been taught, that the Lord's supper is a sacrament, wherein by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is showed forth, and the worthy receivers are not after a corporeal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace. 'This is not the worldling's portion, the whole amount of which is vanity and vexation; no, this is substantial food, even all the blessings of the new and well ordered covenant, the justification of our persons, the renovation of our natures, adoption into the family of God, assurance of his love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost; in a word, all the unsearchable riches of his grace. Thus doth Christ feed his sheep; he invests them with a right to all the blessings of his purchase, and distributes these blessings as their necessities require, till, as Paul hath expressed it, (Eph. iii. 19.) "They are filled with all the fulness of God."—

But farther in the

4th place, It belongs to a good Shepherd to defend his flock, as well as to feed them. And this office he likewise performs in the most effectual manner. He watches over them by night and by day; for "he that keeps Israel, neither slumbers nor sleeps."—"Fear not," says he, "for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee, yea I will help thee, yea I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Their enemies indeed are many and strong, but he is mighty on whom their help is laid. He makes his grace sufficient for them, and will keep them by his power through faith unto salvation. Hear his own words in the 27th and following verses of this chapter, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,

and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father who gave them me, is greater than all : and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." He foresees the trials which are coming upon them ; and prays for them effectually, that their faith may not fail. He gives power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increases strength. And when at any time they stumble and fall, he comes seasonably to their relief, lifts up their hands which hang down, and strengthens their feeble knees ; and having enlarged their hearts, enables them to run in the way of his commandments. Thus does he conduct them through the slippery paths of life, and continues to be their guardian even until death. Neither does he leave them at the hour of death. For,

5thly. When they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, his rod and his staff comfort and sustain them. He fortifies and cheers their departing spirits ; and when the evening shadows gather thick around them, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, is sent to say to them, that death as well as life is theirs. Nay, " the good Shepherd himself, who gave his life for the sheep," will say to them in this awful hour, " Fear not, I am he that liveth and was dead ; and behold, I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and death :—I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." What a multitude of saints, who now inherit the promises, have in their last moments experienced the effect of these gracious and joyful assurances ! In how many instances hath a lively and unexpected view of the promises of God, and of the great redemption, sustained and even

elevated a dying saint, who from the infirmities of the body, or other causes, was, through fear of death, subject to bondage all his life! The sensible presence of the good Shepherd, in these awful moments, will support the most fearful, and the feeblest of the flock. It will enable him that hath no might, to triumph over death, and him that hath the power of death; and, even in the presence of the king of terrors, it will teach him this song of victory, “My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”—“Thanks be unto God, which hath given me the victory, through Jesus Christ my Lord.”—“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus my Lord.” It is true, the saints of God have not all the same degree of sensible comfort at the hour of death. The wisdom of heaven may sometimes permit them to shut their eyes, without perceiving the full extent of the blessedness of them who die in the Lord, or without having received those sensible tokens of their victory over death. But “though weeping may endure for a night,” while they are yet struggling to be released from the mortal tabernacle, their spirits shall awake to everlasting joy. For, in the

6th and last place, When the morning of the day that never ends shall dawn, they shall again see the good Shepherd stretching out his arms to receive them into everlasting habitations. “They shall see him as he is:” they shall “be satisfied with his likeness.” The mansions which he is now preparing for them will then be ready. Each of them shall enter into the blessed abode provided for him. “They shall go no more out for

ever;" and "the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them to living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Then shall they sing together, with united gratitude and joy, the triumphant and eternal song of praise, saying, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing: for thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. Salvation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

And now say, my dear brethren, in the review of what you have heard, is not the Lord Jesus a good Shepherd indeed? He redeemed his flock with his blood, and guides them by his Spirit, and feeds them with all the rich fruits of his purchase. He defends them in life, accompanies them through death, and conducts them to those regions of light and love, where they shall dwell in his presence for evermore, eating the fruit of the tree of life, and drinking the water of the river of life, following the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

Thrice happy they who are the sheep of his pasture; who, allured by his love, and aided by his grace, have returned to him as the "Shepherd and Bishop of their souls."

Let me then call upon such; for of such, I trust, a goodly number are assembled in this place; let me, I say, call upon them to reflect, with gratitude and joy, upon the proofs they have already received of his care and tenderness. Remember how he found you wandering in the wilderness, exposed to every beast of prey, insensible of your danger, and unable to avoid it. Remember how he opened your eyes to see your misery,

and not only discovered the all-sufficient remedy, but powerfully determined and enabled you to apply it. And let these past experiences endear him to your souls, and strengthen your dependance on him, for whatever else may be necessary to complete your salvation.

This is the natural tendency of the representation I have given you, and this is the improvement of it that best suits the occasion of our present meeting. The good Shepherd is this day to feed his own sheep, in the fattest part of that pasture which his love hath prepared for them. The ordinance now before us, doth not merely exhibit the riches of his grace, but seals and applies them to each believer in particular, that, having this security superadded to the unchangeable promise and oath of God, they may “have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge, to lay hold on the hope set before them.”

With this view, then, let us approach the table of the Lord, and pray, that this gospel-feast may prove effectual, by his blessing, to confirm our faith, to inflame our love, and to enliven our hope; that, by the nourishment it affords, we may be strengthened to pursue our journey through this wilderness, till, having passed the Jordan of death, and arrived at the heavenly Canaan, faith and hope shall become sight and enjoyment, and love, ever growing with the ages of eternity, shall embrace, with increasing vigour and delight, the good Shepherd, who gave his life for the sheep. *Amen.*

SERMON L.

HEBREWS xiii. 5.

He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

THIS comfortable declaration or promise is introduced by the Apostle, to enforce the duty of contentment, to which he had exhorted the Hebrews in the preceding part of the verse. Nothing can be more unbecoming in a child of God, than dissatisfaction with his present condition, or anxiety about his future provision in the world. It is no wonder to see worldly men, whose portion of good things lies wholly upon earth, loading themselves with thick clay, and eagerly grasping every thing which their craving appetites demand. Such persons cannot but be uneasy when they meet with disappointments; because, having nothing desirable in prospect beyond the grave, in losing their present enjoyments they lose their *all*. But the Christian, who knows of a treasure in heaven, a treasure incorruptible in its own nature, and which no fraud nor force can take from him, may and ought to look down, with a holy indifference, upon every thing here below, resigning himself entirely to the disposal of his Heavenly Father, who not only knows what is best for him, but hath likewise obliged himself, by covenant and promise, to make all things work together for the eternal advantage of those who love him and confide in his mercy.

It was this argument which Christ used with his disciples, to dissuade them from an anxious solicitude about

their temporal concerns, (Matthew vi. 31.) "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek, and your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." God will support and maintain his own people as long as he has any service for them in this world. He knows all their wants; and as his goodness constantly inclines him, so his power doth at all times enable him, to bestow every needful supply in its season. And can our interest be lodged in better hands? Who that believes this, would choose to be the disposer of his own lot? "The Lord reigneth," says the Psalmist, "let the earth rejoice." And surely they who can say, This God is our God, our Father, and our Friend, have cause to rejoice in every condition, and must act very inconsistently with their profession and hopes, if any thing from without can disturb their inward peace and tranquillity. —I propose, therefore, in dependance upon divine aid, *First.* To show the import of this gracious promise, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Secondly. I shall inquire who the persons are that may apply the comfort of this promise to themselves.

Thirdly. I shall lay before you some of those grounds of assurance on which the people of God may depend for the accomplishment of this promise; and then direct you to the practical improvement of the subject.

I BEGIN with the import of the promise itself, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."—And,

1st. It is here supposed, that all other things may forsake us; for in this promise God plainly intends to distinguish himself from the creatures, by claiming this

perfection of constancy or unchangeableness, as an attribute peculiar to himself. Vanity is engraved in deep and legible characters upon every thing below the sun. All things on earth are perishing in their own nature; and so fleeting and deceitful, that they who lean upon them, only secure to themselves a more intense degree of pain and vexation; for sooner or later they will slide from under them, and leave nothing in their room, but the disgrace of a foolish choice, and the bitterness of disappointed hope. History affords us innumerable proofs of this. The wisest men in every age have observed and lamented the mutability of all earthly things; and we need only keep our eyes and our ears open, to learn this truth, by some fresh example every day we live.

How often do we see riches take unto themselves wings, and fly away as an eagle towards heaven? What a variety of accidents may suddenly deprive a man of all his substance, and reduce him to the lowest state of poverty and want? A storm at sea or a fire at land will in a few hours consume the labours of many years; and he who, whilst I speak, possesseth plenty of all things, and promiseth himself a long succession of prosperous days, may, before to-morrow's sun, find himself stripped of all his substance, and obliged to depend upon the bounty of others for the common necessities of life. How many who boasted that their mountain stood strong, have suddenly been thrown down from the highest pinnacle of power and greatness? Even princes, when they least dreamt of it, have been forced to exchange their palace for a prison; and have learnt, by sad experience, that crowns are but tottering emblems of power, and that royalty itself hath no exemption from the vicissitudes of sublunary things. Reputation and friends, health and all bodily advantages, yea reason,

with all the endowments of the mind, are so uncertain and mutable, that no man can promise on the possession of them. The fairest character may be sullied with the breath of calumny; our friends may prove false or abandon us through mistake; or, when they are faithful, and in all respects comfortable to us, yet death may snatch them from us one after another, till we are in a manner left solitary in the midst of the earth. Health and strength, and whatever else belongs to the body, are of all things the least durable, and the most subject to change. Life itself is but a vapour, which, for any thing we know, may vanish into air the very next breath we draw. We see frequently also, that the mind, as well as the body, is liable to many sad disasters. In some men, the intellectual powers are so blunted and impaired, that they seem to be almost totally extinguished; and, in others, so strangely disordered, that, instead of being of use to them, they serve only to render them more completely wretched. In a word, our condition upon earth is liable to continual alteration, and there is nothing we can be secure of so much as for one moment. How foolish, then, are they who promise themselves any durable happiness in this world? Such persons may truly be said to build their house upon the sand; and though, perhaps, they may be allowed to raise it to some height, yet, ere long, some sudden unforeseen storm shall lay it in ruins, and bury all their vain expectations under it.

But what I would chiefly observe on this head is, that frequently the people of God are exercised with the severest trials, and meet with the sharpest afflictions while they remain upon earth. For this mutability of the creatures is not the effect of *chance* but of *design*. God thereby designs to render all those inexcusable who choose them for their portion: and when his own children are

in danger of being ensnared by them, he pulls them, as it were, with violence out of their hands, that they may be aware of contracting too close an alliance with them in future. He will not suffer them to continue long in so dangerous an error; and he sends the rod to undeceive them: he frequently repeats the stroke, to remind them that they are only sojourners in a strange land, and to quicken their desires for their Father's house above; for their Father's house, where alone they shall have fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

2dly. As the inconstancy of the creatures is here supposed, so this promise necessarily implies, that the presence of God with his people is a sufficient ground of consolation in every state and condition of life. David was sensible of this when he said in the 23d Psalm, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me:" and upon the same principle, the prophet Habakkuk triumphs in name of the church. "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall there be fruit in the vines, the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

We read in the book of Daniel, that after Nebuchadnezzar the king had caused Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego, to be cast into the burning fiery furnace, he was astonished, and rose up in haste, and said unto his counsellors, "Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? And lo! I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." Is there a man who reads this passage, that does not prefer the condition of these captives to all the splendours of the Babylonish

throne? How little does the trembling monarch seem, though surrounded with his counsellors? How glorious do the three young Jews appear, whilst walking amidst flames with their God and Saviour? How would they rejoice in this exalted privilege? And yet, my brethren, all the saints who have God really present with them, although they cannot see him with their bodily eyes, have equal cause to rejoice in the midst of tribulation. For if God be with them, then he is with them who is infinitely wise, who is perfectly acquainted with all their wants, and can never be at a loss to know what is good for them. He is with them who is infinitely powerful, and can easily perform whatever his unerring wisdom shall suggest. He is with them who is perfectly good, yea goodness itself; who is always disposed to employ his wisdom in contriving, and his power in executing, whatever is necessary for their interest and happiness. Yea, he is with them who hath already bestowed on them the greatest of all blessings, even Jesus Christ his unspeakable gift; and, as the Apostle reasons, "If God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" And is not the presence of such a God sufficient for the comfort of his people at all times? Who would mourn the loss of a taper, who enjoys the light of the sun? All the creatures are nothing without God; whereas he is all in all: "In his favour is life, and his loving kindness is better than life." Even Balaam was constrained to confess this truth in the presence of Balak (Numbers xxiii. 23.) "Surely," says he, "there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor any divination against Israel; for the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." If the happiness of Solomon's courtiers excited the admiration of the queen of Sheba, be-

cause they had access to the presence of so wise and magnificent a king, how inconceivably more happy are the friends, nay, the children of the King of kings, who have the infinitely perfect and all sufficient Jehovah continually near to them? Which leads me to observe, in the

3d place, That the constant presence of God with his people is the blessing expressly contained in his promise, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” All other things may forsake you. Riches may take wings and fly away; friends may desert you, or they may die; your reputation may be blasted; your health and strength may fail and decay; yea, memory, judgment, and all the faculties of your mind, may be weakened or destroyed: “But I will never leave you, I will never forsake you;” my friendship is unchangeable; “And whom I love, I love to the end.” All this, saith the Apostle, God hath said; but he doth not tell us when or where he hath said it, because he hath said it so often, and upon such various occasions, that it is to be met with almost every where in Scripture, and in a manner sounds through the whole revelation of his will. And indeed I cannot illustrate this head better, than by reciting some of those passages where this general and comprehensive promise is particularly applied for the comfort of God’s people, under the various trials and afflictions to which they are exposed in this world. All who are acquainted with their Bibles, will remember to have read such passages as these: “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burnt, neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God.” “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the Lord will hear them,

I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water." "The Lord will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in time of trouble." "The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish." "He shall dwell on high, his defence shall be the munition of rocks. Bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure." "The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing. Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness." "A father of the fatherless, a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation."—"Fear not," saith he, "for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

I might quote many other texts, where God promiseth to be with his people in every case of distress that can be supposed; but I shall have said enough to give you some notion of the vast extent of this comfortable promise, when I have added, that it reacheth beyond the grave, and comprehends no less than eternity itself. As God will not leave his people in life, as he will not forsake them at death; so he will at last receive them into glory, and make them to dwell for ever in his immediate presence. But who are his people? Who are the happy persons that may apply the comfort of this promise to themselves? This is the

Second thing I proposed to inquire into.

And, in general, this promise is addressed to believers in Christ Jesus, and to them only, exclusive of all others; for this is the order which God hath established. He first gives us his Son; and when this, "unspeakable gift" is thankfully received, then, together with him, he

freely gives us all other things." Men may fancy themselves in good terms with God upon account of some moral qualifications of which they are possessed; and I greatly suspect, that many among us are ruined by this mistake: but I am not afraid to affirm, that no moral qualifications whatever can reconcile a sinner to God, or entitle him to plead any one promise from the beginning of the Bible to the end of it. The reason is plain: All the blessings promised in the gospel were purchased by Christ with the price of his own blood. To him they belong of right; for in regard of "his humbling himself, and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. God hath highly exalted him," and "hath put all things under his feet, and hath given him to be head over all things to the church." Accordingly Christ himself says (Matth. xi. 27.) "All things are delivered unto me of my Father;" and (Matth. xxviii. 18.) "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Every good and perfect gift, therefore, must be conveyed to us through his hands; and it is not only a vain, but I may even call it an impious attempt, to address God immediately for those blessings which he hath already given to his Son, and committed to his disposal as King of Zion, for the behoof of his true and spiritual subjects. All the promises in Scripture must necessarily be explained in a consistency with this great fundamental truth: and when the persons to whom they are addressed are described by any moral qualification, such as righteousness, mercifulness, and the like, it must always be understood, that they are previously in a state of friendship with God; and that these qualifications are mentioned, not as the terms of their acceptance with him, but only as the fruits and evidences of that faith which unites them to Christ, in whom all the promises are "Yea and Amen."

Would any then know, whether they may apply to themselves the gracious and comfortable promise in my text, they must first of all try their relation to Christ. If they are still unacquainted with this great and only Mediator between God and man; if they have never fled to him as their city of refuge, nor accepted of him as the “Lord their righteousness and their strength;” it is certain that they have no part nor lot in this matter. For nothing can be more express than those words of John the Baptist, (John iii. 36.) “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Whereas, on the other hand, if, from a deep conviction of your guilt and misery, you have cordially accepted the Lord Jesus Christ for all the purposes of a Saviour; if you can say without any known guile, that, renouncing all other grounds of confidence, you depend on him alone for pardon and peace, for grace and glory, and every good thing; if you have the evidence of your faith in Christ, and of your union to him, which arises from the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost on your tempers and your lives, determining you to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in the world; then are you the friends of God, and may lawfully consider yourselves as the persons to whom he hath said, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.” And, for your farther encouragement, I shall now go on to the

Third general head, and briefly suggest to you some of those grounds of assurance upon which you may confidently rely for the accomplishment of this promise. Consider, then,

1st, Who he is that hath said this. “He is not man, that he should lie, nor the son of man, that he should

repent." These are the words of God himself, who is incapable of deceit, and with whom "there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."—"He is the rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are judgment, a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he."—"The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord, that hath mercy upon thee." And is not the word, the promise of such a God, a sufficient ground of trust? Yea, he hath not only said it, but he hath also sworn it. "For God being willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, hath confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, they might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them." And can our souls desire a better security? What can establish our faith, if this doth not establish it?

2dly. Believers in Christ Jesus are the children of God, adopted into his family, and beautified with his image: and this is another pledge of his gracious promise; for surely he will never abandon his own offspring. "Can a mother forget her sucking child," saith God, "that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget, yet will not I forget thee." The affection and tenderness of an earthly parent are but faint resemblances of God's paternal love. In him love is an infinite overflowing fountain of beneficence. And then his love is as permanent as it is extensive. He is always in one mind, and therefore can never leave nor forsake his people.

3dly. The constant intercession of our glorious High-Priest effectually secures the accomplishment of this

promise. By his death he obtained the Holy Spirit to dwell in his people, and to abide with them. This he intimated to his disciples, for their comfort and encouragement, when they were about to lose his bodily presence, (John xvi. 7.) “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.” And, in another place, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth, who shall abide with you;”—who shall abide with you, and that not for a season only, but “for ever.”

With what tenderness did he recommend them to his heavenly Father, in his last intercessory prayer upon earth, (John xvii. 11.) “And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me.” Is it possible, then, that God should forsake those for whom his well-beloved Son pleads with such earnestness and affection? Especially if it be considered, in the

4th and *last* place, That his own glory is interested in the accomplishment of this gracious promise. I mean that glory which consists in making effectual the purposes of his grace towards those whom he hath chosen out of the world. For were he to leave or forsake his people, they must fall a prey to their spiritual enemies, and yield to the adversary of God and man, that triumph which he hath sought from the beginning. That apostate spirit never deserts his purpose of ensnaring and destroying the souls of men. He is ever on the watch to seize them in a defenceless moment; so that were God to leave them without his protection, they would fall easy victims to his artifices. And will he suffer his purposes thus to be baffled by his declared foe? It can-

not be; and therefore he never will leave nor forsake his people.

I shall now conclude this discourse with a short practical improvement, addressed to two different classes of people. And the

1st Sort of persons to whom I will address myself, are those who are yet in a state of alienation from God. It is possible, that at present you may not see the value of this promise which I have been unfolding. You have never, perhaps, been sensible of the vanity of earthly enjoyments; or if you have been weary of some of them, you promise yourselves a permanent satisfaction in others. Alas! this is a delusive expectation; for happiness never can be extracted from the creatures. God hath pronounced an irreversible decree of vanity upon them all. Ye are therefore pursuing what will for ever flee from you;—ye are feeding upon mere husks, which can neither nourish nor satisfy you. But though you should even be contented with this poor and empty portion, yet you cannot always enjoy it; for what will you do when every earthly prop is tottering and ready to sink under you? What will ye do at that period, when neither riches, nor power, nor friends, nor any thing that this world affords, will be able to give you the least relief? Let me therefore entreat you speedily to seek the favour of that God who is the only adequate portion of an immortal soul. Listen to that kind expostulation and advice, (Isa. lv. 2, 3.) “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your souls shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” But I now address myself, in the

2d Place, to those happy persons who are in a state of friendship with God. To you then I say, that this gracious promise should both excite and encourage you to steadfastness in the way of religion. "For if God be with you, who can be against you?" "Be strong then in the Lord, and in the power of his might." All necessary aid is provided for you in the tenor of the well-ordered covenant, and will not fail to be imparted to you in the time of your need. Your help is laid on one who is mighty to save, and who is no less willing than able to support you under all your trials, "Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end." But the principal improvement which you ought to make of this promise, is to put away from your minds all dissatisfaction with your present condition, or anxiety about your future provision in the world. God hath charged himself with the care of providing for you while you are here. He hath not, indeed, promised you an exemption from poverty, hardships, or afflictions; but he hath assured you, that these things are no tokens of his displeasure; nay, on the contrary, that they are intended for your greatest good, and that he is never nearer to his people than when they are in the furnace of affliction. What abundant reason then have you to be contented with whatever lot he is pleased to appoint you in the world, and to look beyond all the momentary distresses you now suffer, to that incorruptible inheritance which is reserved for you in heaven. "Let your conversation then be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

SERMON LI.

Preached on a Day of Thanksgiving, after the dispensation of the Lord's Supper.

GALATIANS V. 24.

And they that are CHRIST'S have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

NO man, who hath experienced the deceitfulness of his own heart, will think the subject of this text improper for the present occasion. It is true this day is set apart for thanksgiving; and with the highest pleasure would I enter on the delightful theme of divine love and condescension, which shall employ the praises of the redeemed through endless ages. But a sollicitous concern, that your joy may be well founded, hath induced me to propose to you a strict examination of yourselves, whether you have indeed an interest in him, through whom all favour and good will to sinners is conveyed. The text furnisheth us with an infallible rule to direct our judgment in this inquiry. "They that are Christ's," not all who are called by his name, but they who are united to him, as the branches are united to the vine, who are governed by his Spirit, and have a right to the benefits of his purchase, are distinguished by *this* attainment, "They have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts."

In discoursing on these words, I propose,

First, To show what is meant by crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts.

Secondly. To show, that it is the distinguishing character and the real attainment of all who are Christ's, to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts. And then to conclude with an improvement suited to the occasion of our present meeting.

I BEGIN with inquiring what is meant by "crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts." By "the flesh," we are to understand the corrupt nature of man; and by "the affections and lusts, those depraved appetites which maintain their power within us, until the renewing grace of God implant in us those seeds of holiness, by which the image of God is formed in our soul. When man came first from the hands of his Maker, his reason, pure and uncorrupted, was the governing principle of his mind. But by transgressing the original commandment, and eating the forbidden fruit, in compliance with a mean corporeal appetite, the sensitive part of his nature obtained that dominion or predominancy which it still maintains in every unrenewed man. Accordingly, we find our natural condition opposed in Scripture, to our regenerated state, under the metaphorical expressions of *flesh* and *spirit*. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The meaning is plainly this: the temper and dispositions which we bring with us into the world by ordinary generation, are, since the fall, carnal and depraved; whereas the temper and dispositions which we receive by the regeneration of the Holy Ghost, are, like their original, spiritual and holy. The same idea is expressed in the 17th verse of this chapter; where it is said, "the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these two are contrary the one to the other." It appears, then, that by the "flesh, with the affections and lusts," we are to understand the cor-

rupt state of man's mind since the first transgression, and all those depraved dispositions and affections which naturally flow from the corrupt principle, and which incline us to seek happiness from earthly things, independent of God. We learn too what is meant by "crucifying the lusts and affections of the flesh;" namely, that this natural depravity of mind is subdued; that the carnal principle, like a crucified malefactor, languishes and decays; until, by degrees, gracious or renewed habits are formed in us, which at last obtain the full possession of our minds.

What hath been said may suffice to give a plain and intelligible explanation of the terms in the text; and to pursue the metaphor farther, would neither be profitable to you nor agreeable to myself. The words thus explained give us a very distinguishing character of a true Christian. He is one who, by the grace of God, hath obtained the victory over his corrupt appetites and inclinations. He is in a great measure rescued from the ruins of the fall, and is no longer a servant of sin, that he should obey it in the lusts thereof. "He hath put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and being renewed in the spirit of his mind, hath put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."—"The law of the spirit of life, which is in Christ Jesus, hath made him free from the law of sin and death." Conscience, long dethroned by imperious passions, hath reassumed its authority; and all the faculties of his mind, purified and exalted, unite in the pursuit of spiritual enjoyments.

And now, my brethren, let me entreat you to stop your ears for a little against the suggestions of self-love, and let conscience bear testimony, whether you have

indeed a claim to this character. Alas! if you have no claim to it, this can be no day of thanksgiving to you. If you have adventured to approach the table of the Lord with all your unmortified lusts about you, ye have been guilty of the body and blood of Christ; ye have sealed the sentence of your own condemnation; and lamentation becomes you better than the voice of praise. You may, perhaps, complain of this as a severe and heavy message; but dare any of you say that it is a message without a warrant? Shall I speak peace to those to whom God hath not spoken peace? Shall I sooth you with false comforts, which might lead you down to the grave with a lie in your right hand? No; I remember too well the wo pronounced against the prophet "who dealeth falsely, and healeth the wound of the daughter of God's people slightly." I should not wish to be an eternal subject of imprecation to hopeless souls, which I should well deserve to be, if I spoke any other language to you than what I now speak.

But you have as yet no cause to complain: I have indeed set before you the danger, but I have not said you must despair. On the contrary, my only object is to prevent your everlasting despair, by awakening your fears ere it be too late, and the door of mercy be shut against you. That door is still open, and the call is yet, "To-day hear his voice." O then harden not your hearts against conviction. Decline not an impartial scrutiny into your real state. Let this passage of Scripture inform you, whether you indeed belong to Christ. If you do possess the marks of those who are his, take the comfort of your sincerity, and give God the glory. But if the issue of the inquiry should turn out otherwise, O beware of resting in this dreadful condition. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eye-lids, till you have

secured an interest in that blood of sprinkling which cleanseth from all sin.

Need I enter on a detail of those lusts and affections which flow from a corrupt and depraved principle within? "The works of the flesh," saith the Apostle, (at the 19th verse of this chapter) are "manifest; which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

I am sensible, that, after the recital of so black a catalogue of crimes, the most of you will already have acquitted yourselves of such enormous degrees of guilt. And I am afraid, that this general acquittal from the charge of heinous transgressions, lulls the consciences of many into a fatal security. I will not go so far as to say, that it were better for the unconverted sinner, that his conscience could charge him with some of these glaring iniquities, although our Saviour's saying seems to imply as much, viz. That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of heaven before the scribes and pharisees. All that I assert is, that you ought not too hastily to conclude that the flesh is crucified with its affections and lusts, merely because your lives have not been spotted with any of those gross and scandalous sins. In these days of light and knowledge, Satan doth not find it for his interest to push men to the extremities of vice. He rather endeavours to keep the garrison in peace, by blunting the edge of conviction with the fair shows of outward decency and formality.

Be persuaded then to go deeper into your inquiry. Search

the very inmost corners of your hearts. Put the authority of God in one scale, and the interests of the flesh in another, and see which of the two weighs heavier in your affections. You frequent the church, you attend on ordinances, and perform the external parts of religion with an apparent relish and alacrity. All this is good; but beware of building too much on it. Consider that these observances do not in any great degree thwart the interests of the flesh. The laws and customs of the land favour you; your estates are not thereby impaired, nor your lives endangered; nor is your reputation hurt, but rather advanced. But suppose the case to be otherwise, and let your hearts give the answer.—Would you persist in the same course at all risks, though your estates were exposed to confiscation, though your names were to be branded with every term of reproach that malice could devise; yea, though all the engines of torture lay in the road of duty? Would no prospect of gain, however secure from human discovery, tempt you to encroach on the divine rules of justice and equity? Can you bless them that curse you, and render good for evil, and forgive the most galling injuries, even when Providence puts your enemies in your power? Did the objects of criminal desire not only tempt but solicit you; were you favoured with every circumstance of time and place, could you check the career of passion, with Joseph's reflection, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" These, indeed, are sure signs that the flesh is crucified with the affections and lusts. But if, on the contrary, the fear of man's censure or punishment would turn you aside from the practice of your duty, if the prospect of secret gain could tempt you to lie or cheat or dissemble; if any injury appears too great to be forgiven, or any sensual appetite too importunate to be denied;

in a word, if any temptation, be its circumstances what they will, would prevail on you to indulge yourselves in the deliberate omission of any known duty, or in the practice of any known sin ; then, whatever your pretences are, the flesh, with its affections and lusts, is not yet crucified in you. But do not mistake me, as if I meant to assert, that none have crucified the flesh but those who are perfect in holiness. No; the righteous man falleth seven times a day, and riseth again. Nay, there is not a just man upon earth that doth good, and sinneth not. And therefore I speak not of those false steps to which the best are liable through the remainders of corruption; but of known and habitual sins, committed with the full bent and inclination of the will. These plainly betray the predominancy of the flesh, with its affections and lusts; and show, that the person who is under the dominion of them, has no just or Scriptural claim to an interest in Christ. For a worldly Christian, or a carnal Christian, or a dishonest Christian, are as gross contradictions in terms as an infidel Christian. And this naturally leads me to the

Second thing proposed; which was to show that it is the distinguishing character and the real attainment of all who are Christ's, to crucify the flesh, with the affections and lusts. This is so much the uniform language of the New Testament, that one should hardly think it required a proof. The great lesson which our Lord taught his disciples was expressed in these words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." This he repeated on various occasions, as a subject that ought to employ their constant attention. "He that taketh not up his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."—"If any man come after me, and hate not his father and mother, and

wife and children, and brethren and sisters," those nearest and dearest relations according to the flesh, "yea, and his own life also," when the preservation of it becomes inconsistent with the duty he owes to God, "he cannot be my disciple." And again, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath," namely, habitually in affection, and actually too, when God calls him to it, "he cannot be my disciple." These are the permanent, the invariable laws of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and are equally binding on us, as on those to whom they were originally addressed. For had our Lord ever intended to relax or mitigate them in any degree, he would certainly have done it in favour of his first disciples, when his church was yet in its infant state, and therefore stood in need of greater indulgence. But these seemingly hard sayings express the true spirit of Christianity, and afford the most convincing proof of its divine original. Man fell by seeking himself, and must therefore be raised in the way of self-denial. He forfeited his innocence and happiness by hearkening to the solicitation of a fleshly appetite; and, before he can regain happiness, the flesh must be crucified, with the affections and lusts.

Accordingly, we find that our Saviour's meaning was well understood by his immediate followers; and their practice is the best commentary on his injunctions. What he recommended, they laboured to attain. Thus Paul writes to the Corinthians, "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away." The remainders of corruption within him, made him cry out with all the emphasis of distress, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Nay, so sensible was he of the importance and necessity

of this deliverance, that, as he expresseth it himself, "He counted all things but loss and dung;" first, "That he might win Christ, and be found in him not having his own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." And next, "That he might know Christ" experimentally, "and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." Nor was this only his *wish*; we find also that it was his real attainment. "I am crucified," says he, "with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." "And God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." Neither was Paul singular in this. It appears to have been the common attainment of all true Christians in his time. For it is spoken of in my text as the badge of Christianity, the very thing which distinguished Christians from all other men. "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts." I have given a recital of these passages of Scripture, as they serve to explain one another: and I hope that when they are compared together, and duly considered, they will appear to be a sufficient demonstration, that none whose flesh is not crucified, with its affections and lusts, can, with a Scriptural warrant, lay claim to an interest in Christ.

Thus have I endeavoured to explain what is meant by "crucifying the flesh, with the affections and lusts;" and have shewn you, that this is the actual attainment of every true Christian. Allow me now to conclude this discourse with a practical improvement of the subject. From what hath been said, then, we learn in the

1st place, What is the true nature of our holy religion. It is not a mere bodily exercise, consisting only in external ceremonies or observances. Earthly rulers can ask no more but an outward homage: but the Searcher of hearts challengeth the sincere adoration of the inner man. He who is a Spirit, must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. So that to attend the church, to partake of religious ordinances, and to perform the external duties of religion, will be of no avail in the sight of God, unless these outward services proceed from a heart warmed with his love, in which every usurping lust, that would share his place, is vanquished and dethroned. To be a real Christian, therefore, is not so easy an attainment as many seem to imagine. Flesh and blood must be wrestled with, and overcome; "for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven." Every gratification that is contrary to the holiness of the divine nature, although dear to us as a right hand or a right eye, must be denied. Nay, the very inclination to vicious indulgences must be subdued, otherwise our abstaining from the outward acts of them will be of no avail. It is the heart that God requires; and if we deny him this, we can give him nothing that is worthy of his acceptance.

An inoffensive outward deportment may sooth your consciences, and prevent the uneasy feelings of remorse, but will not save you from final ruin. The very interest of the flesh may make a man forbear disgraceful sins, and may, for a time, chain up, without weakening, the vigour of corruption. You may be possessed of many amiable qualities, by which you deserve well of society, and yet be total strangers to that character of real Christians which is given in this text. If temporary good impressions, or restraints of the flesh for a season, would amount to that character, then Felix, who trembled un-

der conviction, and Herod, who did many things in consequence of the Baptist's preaching, had been real Christians. If the estimable qualities of social life were a proof that Christianity had its full effect on the mind, then the young ruler, who had kept the second table of the law from his youth upwards, would have had an unreserved approbation from our Lord. But Felix and Herod relapsed under the dominion of their lusts; and through the love of this world, the young ruler fell short of the kingdom of heaven. In the

2d place, From what hath been said, let each of us be prevailed on to try how matters stand with himself. You see that it is not a point to be lightly taken for granted, that a man hath a real interest in Christ. I have already mentioned several things under my first head of discourse, which may serve as hints to direct you in this trial. All that I have further to beg of you is, that you would judge yourselves impartially, as those who expect a judgment to come. Try every ground of hope upon which you have hitherto rested; let every rotten pillar be removed, or else the whole building, however glorious in appearance, will shortly fall to the ground. Self-love may, for a season, blind your eyes; but remember, that it will throw no veil over that impartial judgment which will overtake you at the bar of God. Compare, then, your actions, and dispositions with that holy and spiritual law which flatters no man; and then, if conscience gives an unbiassed judgment, I have little doubt that numbers in this assembly will discover, that "the flesh, with its affections and lusts," is not only alive, but in full vigour. Nay, the very best will find cause to conclude, that the corrupt principle is not yet crucified as it ought to be.

As for those of the first class now mentioned, if the text itself does not furnish them with a sufficient motive

for crucifying the flesh, I despair of being able to offer any other which will be more powerful. I might tell you, how mean it is to let sense give law to reason, and to prefer the earthly tabernacle to its immortal inhabitant. I might assure you, that you are serving an ungrateful master, whom you can never satisfy; that, while you feed one lust, you must starve another, whose importunate cravings will destroy the relish of your imagined happiness. I might tell you, that the flesh must ere long be reduced to rottenness and dust, and be buried underground, that it may be no offence to the living. But what are all these arguments compared with that motive which is implied in the text, that, unless you crucify the flesh, you do not belong to Christ; and if you have no interest in Christ, God is a consuming fire? So that this furnisheth me with an address, to the same purpose with what a brave officer made to his soldiers in a day of battle, "Unless ye kill your enemies," said he, "they will kill you." In like manner, I say to you, Unless ye crucify the flesh, it will be your everlasting ruin. "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."

As for you who are mourning over the remainders of corruption, and struggling to get free from them, I know that you will require no motives to engage you to go on in this opposition to the carnal principle. I shall therefore, only offer you a few directions, with which I will now conclude.

Keep a strict watch over your senses. Let nothing enter into the soul by these avenues without a strict examination. Avoid with the utmost caution all those things which may inflame your passions, and accustom yourselves to contradict them in their first tendencies to evil. A spark may easily be quenched, which, after it hath kindled a flame, will baffle all your industry. Improve that holy ordinance, which you have been celebrating,

to this salutary purpose. The contemplation of a crucified Saviour, is an excellent mean to assist you in crucifying the flesh. When your appetites solicit any unlawful indulgence, remember him who had not even the common accommodations of nature. When your flesh requires ease and pleasure, think of him who pleased not, or minded not himself, but for your sakes submitted to hunger and thirst, weariness and watching, pain and reproach, and at last to an ignominious death. When riches inflame your desires, reflect on the history of Jesus, “who, though he was rich, for your sakes became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich.” When the desire of applause, or the fear of censure from man, tempt you to desert the path of duty, then remember him, who for you made himself of no reputation, gave his head to be crowned with thorns, and his body to be arrayed with the garb of derision, and was suspended on a cross in the company of malefactors. In all these views, let your eyes be directed to Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. Above all, depend much on the grace of God, and pour out your souls in fervent supplications for the Spirit of Promise, by whose assistance alone you can mortify the deeds of the body, and crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts. Principles of philosophy may restrain our evil passions; but nothing less than the Omnipotent power of divine grace can overcome them. Plead, therefore, earnestly, that he who is now ascended up on high, and hath received gifts for men, may grant you every needful supply in this difficult warfare; that so when you have fought the good fight, and overcome your enemies, both within and without you, you may be publicly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly happy in the full enjoyment of God for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON LII.

PSALM iv. 6, 7.

There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?

LORD, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

THE chief distinction between a child of God and a man of the world, lies in the prevailing tendency of their desires. Both of them are engaged in the pursuit of happiness. But the one aims at nothing higher than the present gratification of his appetites, while the other rises above this world, and aspires at the supreme felicity of his immortal nature. The one seeks information from every quarter concerning the object of his pursuit; the other asks the blessing directly from the Giver of all good. The one seeks a happiness separated from God: the whole earth, without the light of God's countenance, would appear to the other a barren wilderness, and a place of exile.—I propose, in discoursing on this subject,

First, To make a few remarks on the Psalmist's description of these opposite characters.

Secondly. To illustrate the two following propositions which naturally arise from the text, namely, That worldly men have little cause to rejoice in the temporal advantages which they possess; and that the light of God's countenance is sufficient to gladden the heart of a saint in all circumstances whatsoever.

The illustration of these particulars will give rise to a practical improvement of the subject.—Let us,

First, Attend to the description of worldly men in the first part of the 6th verse, “There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?”—It is obvious, in the

1st place, That this question betrays a great degree of inward dissatisfaction and perplexity. They speak like men who have no relish for what they possess, and who are utterly at a loss to what hand to turn to for enjoyment. They do not ask, Who will shew us the *chief* good? But, “Who will shew us *any* good?” any thing to fill up the craving vacuity of our minds: a plain intimation that hitherto they have been miserably disappointed in their pursuits, and that at the time of the question, they cannot find any thing in their lot that deserves the name of good. They are unacquainted with happiness, though they have been always in search of it, and neither know wherein it consists, nor how it is to be obtained.—It deserves our notice,

2dly. That the only good which they inquire for is some present sensible enjoyment, which may be pointed out to the eye of sense, and may be immediately laid hold of. “Who will *show* us any good?” They are strangers to the operation of that faith, which is “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.” They look not “at the things which are unseen and eternal;” their views are confined within the narrow limits of this present life; and they covet no other portion than they suppose may be found in the world of sense.—It may be observed,

3dly. That they make no discrimination of the objects which they seek after. *Any* good will be welcome to them; let it be good food, or good clothing; a good estate by lawful means, or a good estate by any means

whatever; a good bargain in business, or a good booty by theft or plunder: no matter what it is, provided it gives them pleasure in the mean time, or relieves them from the irksome labour of thinking on themselves, and on the great end for which they were made.—Once more, in the

4th place, You observe, that amidst all their dissatisfaction with their present state, and their eager desires after something better, they do not turn their thoughts at all to God, but seem rather determined to banish the remembrance of him from their minds. They seek counsel from others, but none from him: they inquire at weak and erring mortals like themselves, but they neither ask wisdom nor grace from God.

Such is the representation which the Psalmist gives us of the temper and of the language of worldly men. He further tells us, that the character of which he gives this description was a common one in his time: “There be many that say, Who will shew us any good?” And it is but too apparent, that multitudes of men do still exhibit the same temper. They have no relish for spiritual and divine enjoyments; their only care is, “What they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed.”—“They labour abundantly for the meat which perisheth, but not at all for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life.” And though they meet with repeated disappointments in every new experiment; yet instead of seeking after happiness where it is alone to be found, they still renew the fruitless search among the creatures around them, and cry out with as much keenness as ever, “Who will shew us any worldly good?”

Let us now turn our eyes to a different object, and consider the temper of a child of God, as it is beautifully

described by the Psalmist. Whilst others say, "Who will shew us any good?" the language of his heart is, "Lord lift thou upon me the light of thy countenance." He, too, seeks what is good; for the desire of happiness is common to all.—But you will observe,

1st, That it is not *any* good that will satisfy him: he cannot feed upon husks; it is a real and substantial good that he seeks after. Nay, it is the chief good. He disdains the thought of having any thing less than this for the portion of his soul. He knows that all other sources of enjoyment are no better than "broken cisterns, which can hold no water;" adapted indeed to supply the wants of the body, but in no respect suited to the immortal spirit, either as the objects of its choice, or the sources of its happiness.—And as nothing can satisfy him but a real and permanent good, so we find,

2dly, That he knows where that good is to be found. He has no need to solicit information from every one he meets. He knows that the favour of God, and the sense of his loving kindness, are the only sources of true happiness. Here therefore he fixeth his choice, and is perfectly satisfied that he is right in doing so.

The worldly mind is in a state of perpetual fluctuation. Having no determinate object in view, it runs wild in pursuit of every delusive image of good; and when disappointed in one object, only feels a more intense desire to seek its gratification in another.

But the enlightened mind seeth vanity engraved in deep and legible characters, on all things below the sun; and therefore looks beyond and above them for its portion, saying with the devout Psalmist, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth whom I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."—I observe, in the

3d place, That a child of God goes directly to God himself, and begs the blessing from him. He loses no time in wandering among the creatures, or in making experiments of sensual pleasure; but takes the shortest road to the object he pursues. He flies to the arms of his father, and implores that he would smile on him, and grant him his salvation. Sensible at the same time of his unworthiness, he claims nothing as a debt; but what he asks, he prays for as a free unmerited gift, fetching all his arguments from his mercy, and pleading with him for his own name's sake, "O Lord, lift thou upon me the light of thy countenance."—Once more, in the

4th place, It deserves our notice, that the Psalmist, in the name of all the godly, useth this prayer in direct opposition to the carnal language of wordly men, who are continually crying, "Who will shew us any good?" Hereby intimating to us, that a child of God can relish no sweetness in any inferior good, till he be assured of the divine favour; and that when this great blessing is obtained, nothing amiss can come to him. Even amidst the abundance of outward things, he mourns and languisheth, as long as he apprehends God to be at a distance from him. And no sooner doth he behold his reconciled countenance, than he forgets every outward calamity, and can rejoice in the lowest state of poverty and distress.

In a word, to the spiritual man the favour of God is one thing needful. As to the other things, which may be either good or bad, as they are used, he dares not be peremptory in his choice; "For who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" But the favour of his God he cannot want. Here all his desires centre, and here he hath treasured up all the wishes of his heart.

Having thus considered the Psalmist's description of

these two opposite characters in the text, let us now proceed,

Secondly, To illustrate the propositions which arise from this comparison—The

First which I mentioned was, 'That worldly men have little cause to rejoice in the temporal advantages which they possess.

Stretch your imaginations to the utmost; fancy to yourselves a man raised above all his fellows, enjoying every thing that his heart can wish, obeyed and honoured by all around him; let luxury furnish out his house and table; let prosperity attend his steps, and crown his undertakings with glory. Add to these advantages, if you will, the splendid titles of king and hero; and when you have finished the gaudy picture, say, what doth the value of it amount to?

1st. May not all these outward things consist with present misery of the person who possesseth them? May not the man who hath reached the summit of earthly grandeur be the wretched slave of his own passions, and suffer all the torments of a diseased mind? Who have, in fact, held the most complaining language on the subject of human life? Have not those who have drunk deepest of the cup of prosperity, and whose minds, satiated with pleasure, have become the prey of spleen and disappointment. Unless, therefore, we can finish the description of the prosperous man, by saying, that his soul is as flourishing as his body, and that his eternal interest is as well secured as his temporal advantages seem to be, all that we have supposed him to possess must go for nothing. He is indeed more sumptuously miserable than any of his fellow-creatures, but cannot be allowed to have the least reasonable cause of joy.

God seeth not as man seeth. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God searcheth the heart. Accordingly, he speaks a language very different from the men of the world, and calls those “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and naked,” who think themselves, and perhaps are thought by others, to be “rich, and increased in goods, and to stand in need of nothing.” And will any wise man, then, rejoice in these outward circumstances, which may so easily consist with the real misery of the person who possesseth them? Especially if we consider,

2dly, That these very things are frequently the means of making men miserable, and of fixing them in that deplorable state. How many have been fruitful in the low valley of adversity, who have proved barren, after they removed their habitations to the high mountains of prosperity? And should any man rejoice, because he must pass to heaven as a camel must pass through the eye of a needle? Is it not difficult enough to keep our hearts and affections above, even when we have little or nothing to confine them below? And should we, who already stumble at a straw, rejoice that we have rocks of offence, and mountains of provocation cast in our way? How few are advanced to higher measures of faith and holiness, by their advancement in the world? How strangely doth prosperity transform men, and make them forget their former apprehensions of things, their convictions, their purposes, and their vows; nay, their God, their happiness, and themselves? While men are low in the world and live by faith, they do good with the little which they possess, and have the blessing of a willing mind: Whereas, when they are lifted up, they often lose the inclination, in proportion as they increase in the inability of doing good, and use their superior ta-

lents only to bring upon themselves a heavier condemnation. The carnal mind commonly grows with the carnal interest, and the greatest opposers of God have in all ages been the very persons who were most indebted to his goodness. Rejoice not then in the possession of these common mercies for their own sake; and learn to value them only as they are made subservient to your real usefulness, and to your spiritual joy. For, in the

3d place, All these things may end in misery, and leave the owner in everlasting wo. He who to-day "is clothed in purple and fine linen, and fares sumptuously," may to-morrow "lift up his eyes in torments." "Weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth" may succeed to his carnal mirth. If this shall happen, he shall then cry out, O that I had lain in mendicinal rags, instead of having got this mortal surfeit of prosperity! Alas! are all my pleasant morsels to be for ever exchanged for this gall and wormwood! O deplorable state! O wretched issue of a carnal life!

Think not that I am an enemy to your joy in urging these remonstrances. My sole aim is to lead you to that fountain, which will at all times supply you with the most exalted delight; the sense of the love of God, and the sure prospect of immortal felicity. Were you in this happy condition, then should I bid you rejoice even in those temporal mercies, as the gifts of your Heavenly Father, the tokens of his love, and the pledges of your future inheritance. I would then address you in the words of the preacher, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works." But until you have made sure of this one thing needful, I must be an enemy to your secure and carnal joy. The frantic mirth of a madman is an object that will cast a damp on a mind most

addicted to gaiety ; and I appeal to yourselves, whether it be reasonable for a man to rejoice, who, in the midst of all his pleasures, cannot have the smallest assurance that he shall be the next moment out of hell. A wicked man, suffering the horrors of an awakened conscience, is indeed an object of commiseration : but a far greater object of commiseration is that man, who, in the depths of misery, and on the very brink of perdition, still retains his thoughtless and insensible gaiety of heart. This is that laughter of which Solomon might well say, “ It is mad ;” and that mirth of which he saith, “ what doth it ?” How many are now in sorrow, by reason of this unseasonable and sinful joy ? They were too gay to listen to the grave admonitions of God’s word ; too eagerly bent upon their delusive pleasures to attend to the motions of his Holy Spirit ; and, therefore, because when God called they would not hear ; so now he laughs at their calamity, and mocks when their fears are come upon them. It is the awful apprehension of this which constrains me to be earnest with you in my present argument. The pleasure which you take in the enjoyment of sense, is that which makes you careless of the pleasures of religion. Could I for once prevail with you to enter into your own breasts, to abstract yourselves from the business and pleasures of this vain world, and to think seriously for one day upon your everlasting state, I should not despair of convincing you, that this earth can afford nothing which can be an equivalent for your immortal souls. But, alas ! your sensual dissipated mirth banished all reflection, and makes you deaf to the sober voice of reason. When you are confined to a bed of sickness, indeed, or languishing under some painful disease, it is possible for a religious monitor to obtain something like a patient hearing from you : but when your flesh is

in vigour, and capable of relishing outward pleasures, this docile season is no more, and all the truths which relate to another world become grating and offensive to your ears, like the sound of an instrument out of tune. I have only to add, on this head, that were your mirth, such as it is, to endure for any time, I should wonder the less at your rejecting this admonition. But, alas! to be jocund, or even happy, for a day, and then to lie down in endless torment, is a dismal prospect indeed. To see a man laugh and play, and brave it out, in a vessel which is so swiftly running down a stream which terminates in a gulf of endless horror, is a shocking spectacle, and calls loudly on every one who sees it to warn the unhappy person of his danger. This hath been my office to you; and could I be your friend if I did less? If I did not obtest to you with all the earnestness of which I am capable, to secure your interest in another world than this, and to derive your joys from something better than the portion of the sensualist?

Let us now turn our eyes to a more agreeable object, and survey those solid grounds of joy which belong to the people of God.—For the

Second proposition which I proposed to illustrate was, that the light of God's countenance is sufficient to gladden the heart of a saint in all circumstances whatsoever. For this purpose let us consider from what sources the joys of a saint proceed.

1st, 'Then, he is possessed of the joy which results from comparing his present happy condition with the misery in which he was once involved. He remembers a time when, like others, he wandered in the vanity and darkness of his mind, still putting the anxious question, "Who will shew me any good?" When, like a sheep, he went astray, in the dark and howling wilderness;

when he fed upon mere husks, and spent his money for that which is not bread. "But now he is returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of his soul." He is passed from death to life: the Judge of the universe is at peace with him, and hath cast all his sins into the depths of the sea. He hath got within the walls of the city of refuge, where the avenger of blood cannot enter; the sword of justice is put up in its scabbard; and that Almighty being, upon whom he constantly depends, hath laid aside his wrath, and beholds him with a pleasant countenance. And, therefore, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet will he rejoice in the Lord, he will joy in the God of his salvation."—But a

2d Source of joy to a child of God consists in the actual honours and privileges conferred upon him. He is advanced to the dearest and most intimate relation to God, adopted into his family, and invested with all the rights of a son. In him that life is begun, which, being hid with Christ in God, shall be preserved and improved, till at length it be perfected in the heavenly world. "Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart." To you it belongs to come bodily to a throne of grace, in the assured hope that you shall obtain mercy, and find grace to help you in every time of need: by the blood of Jesus you can enter into the holiest, and in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God; casting all your care upon him, because he careth for you. He is yours who possesseth all things, and what can you want? He is yours who can do all things, and what should you fear? He is yours who is

goodness and love itself, how then can you be miserable, or what imperfection can there be in your felicity? His faithfulness is pledged to make all things work together for your good. The most afflictive events, like the furnace or pruning hook, shall only purge away your dross, or render you more fruitful. So that you may glory in tribulation, “knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope that maketh not ashamed.” To conclude this detail of the privileges of a saint, hear how the Apostle to the Corinthians describes them, (1 Corinth. iii. 21.) “All things are yours, whether Paul, or Appollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” Once more,

3dly. The joy of a saint proceeds from the contemplation of those future blessings which as yet are only the objects of hope. But in speaking of these, where shall we begin? Shall I pass beyond the dark and lonely grave, which Job hath styled “the house appointed for all living,” and lead you upwards at once to the realms of light and joy, to survey that house, with many mansions, whither Christ is gone to prepare a place for his people? No; in the passage I last quoted, we find death reckoned among the possessions of believers. To those who belong to Christ, death ceaseth to be the king of terrors. The stroke he gives doth indeed put an end to the existence of the old man; but by that very stroke, the fetters which galled the new man in Christ are broken asunder, and the life imparted by the second Adam comes to full maturity, when that which was derived from the first Adam concludes. When, therefore, we view death and the grave as consecrated by Christ, who died and was buried, they are no more to be ranked

among the articles of the curse denounced against the original apostacy, but fall to be enrolled among the “things to come;” of which every believer may say, They are mine. In this light did Paul behold them, when he said, “To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.—I desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.”—“While I am at home in the body, I am absent from the Lord. I am, therefore, confident and willing, rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.”—“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be unto God who giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

But it is the resurrection which shall complete the triumph of the saints, when that which is sown in weakness, in dishonour, and corruption, shall be raised in power, in glory, and incorruption. In that day of the manifestation of the sons of God, when our vile bodies shall be changed and fashioned like unto Christ’s glorious body, “when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” But how shall we speak of the glory yet to be revealed, “which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.” Should I attempt any description of it, I should only “darken counsel by words without knowledge.”—“It doth not yet appear,” saith the apostle John, “what we shall be: but this we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” Here, then, let us stop. To be made like the Son of God, to behold his unveiled glory, and to be for ever with him: these particulars must sure-

ly include every ingredient which can belong to the highest perfection and happiness of a creature. With this great object in our eye, how well doth it become us to adopt the language of the apostle Peter, and to say with fervent gratitude, as he did, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

These are the peculiar sources from which the godly man derives his joy. And may I not now appeal to you, whether they are not of such a nature, as that no outward distress or calamity can take them away? Even when the heavens shall be rolled together like a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, he will be able to look at the mighty desolation, and say, when all these materials are consumed, I shall have lost nothing; "God liveth, blessed be my rock." "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance," and in him I possess and enjoy all things.

And now what improvement are we to make of this subject?—In the

1st place, Let us inquire which of the characters described by the Psalmist belongs to us. Are we among the many that say, "Who will shew us any good?" or are we among the happy few who seek the light of God's countenance above all things? There is no neutral person in this case. Every man that liveth upon the earth is either "carnally minded, which is death; or spiritually minded, which is life and peace;" either a child of God, or a drudge and slave to the world. To which party, then, do you belong? What are your hearts principally set upon, and whither do you bend your chief and

most vigorous endeavours? If you can find but little leisure for the service of God, and the care of your souls; if you can spend whole days without calling upon God, or reading his word; if the Sabbath appears burdensome to you, and you join in your hearts with those profane persons whom the prophet Amos describes, as saying, (viii. 5.) “When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath, that we may set forth wheat?” If you are conscious that it is thus with you, I need scarcely inform you, that you must be classed with those whose language it is, “Who will shew us any good?” A

2d Use, therefore, which I would make of this subject, is to exhort you, who are yet carnally minded, to think seriously of your condition. Ye are pursuing what will for ever flee from you. Ye are combatting with a decree of him who is Almighty, even that irreversible decree which hath pronounced vanity on all things below the sun. Ye are opposing the experience of all who ever made the same trial before you; ye are struggling with the very feelings of your own hearts, which as yet have never found that permanent satisfaction which they require. O then be persuaded to relinquish those false plans of happiness by which you have been hitherto deluded, and to seek the favour of that God who is the only adequate portion of an immortal soul. Listen to that expostulation and advice, (Isa. lv. 2, 3.) “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Harken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”

Lastly, let me call on those who have been taught to value the light of God's countenance above all things, to be humble and thankful. Often recollect that mercy which plucked you as brands out of the burning, and set you apart to see the glory of the Lord, and to show forth his praise. Often acknowledge that sovereign grace by which you were arrested in the broad way that leads to destruction, and led to him who alone hath the words of eternal life. "Who made thee to differ, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?" If he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined into your hearts, to give you the light of the knowledge of his glory, as it shines in the face of Jesus; adore and praise this distinguishing goodness; acknowledge, with humble gratitude, that it was the doing of the Lord. And if you would continue to enjoy the comfort which ariseth from the light of God's countenance, be careful to abound in all those "fruits of righteousness, which are through Christ to the praise and glory of God." Our duty and our comfort are wisely and graciously connected together. "Great peace have they that love thy law," saith the Psalmist, "and nothing shall offend them." "The work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever." As many as walk according to this rule, peace shall be on them, and mercy, and on the Israel of God. *Amen.*

SERMON LIII.

Preached on the Evening of a Communion Sabbath, March 16, 1783, a few days before the Author's death.

HEBREWS ix. 28.

CHRIST was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.

THERE are two things which we are taught to believe concerning Christ. The *first* is, That he once appeared in this world, clothed with our nature; that he published to sinners of mankind a pure and heavenly doctrine; and after exhibiting, in his own conduct, a fair and unblemished example of holy obedience, at last offered up himself a sacrifice to God, to expiate our offences, and purchase our eternal redemption. The *second* is, That this same Jesus, who was dead, is now alive, and sitteth on the right hand of the Majesty on high, from whence he shall come at the end of the world, crowned with glory and honour, and attended with all the host of heaven, to judge the quick and the dead.

We were this day commemorating, in the Holy Sacrament of the Supper, what Christ hath already done for the redemption of his people. There we beheld him “evidently set forth as crucified before our eyes,” bearing our griefs, and “wounded for our transgressions.” And now to display the riches of his grace, and our infinite obligations to love and serve him, let us with joy

contemplate what he is farther to do, as it is shortly expressed in the latter part of my text: "Unto them that look for him, shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." The

First thing that claims our attention is the certainty of our Lord's return. "He shall appear the second time." And, blessed be God, this comfortable truth doth not depend upon any doubtful process of reasoning, but is both supported and illustrated by a variety of the most clear and express declarations of holy writ. The apostle Jude informs us, that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, by faith foresaw this great event, and said by divine inspiration, "Behold, the Lord cometh ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment on all." It was Christ's promise to his disciples, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." The angels who attended him at his ascension into heaven bare witness to the same truth. "Ye men of Galilee," said they, "why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Nay, we are told, that the Father hath appointed the very day in which "he shall judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained." In a word, this doctrine is not only frequently asserted in Scripture, but is so intimately connected with all the other parts of revelation, that the whole must stand or fall with it. Is not the Sacrament of the Supper a visible pledge of our Lord's return, as well as a memorial of his sufferings and death? And do we not profess an equal belief of both, every time we

partake of that holy ordinance. “For as often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup, we do show the Lord’s death till he come;” that is, we commemorate his death in the faith of his second and glorious appearance.

This, my brethren, is an interesting truth, and doth justly challenge our most serious attention. It is not more certain that we are met together in this place, than that we shall all meet again at the tribunal of Christ, where every one of us shall appear in his true colours, without any mask or disguise. At present we are but little acquainted with ourselves, and frequently mistaken by others; but the sentence of the supreme Judge will rectify all mistakes, and at once put an end to the presumptuous hope of the hypocrite, and to the fears and anxieties of the humble self-suspecting soul. Whom he then justifies, none can condemn; and whom he then condemns, none dare justify, neither is there any that can deliver out of his hand. What a mighty influence ought this to have on our temper and practice? Were any of us to be tried for our lives at a human bar, I am persuaded that the thoughts of it would so fully possess our minds, as to leave room for almost nothing else. Yet the most that the judge can do in such a case, is to determine the day beyond which we shall not live; while neither he, nor any man in the world, can say with certainty, that we shall live till that day come. One of a thousand accidents may cut us off, and prevent the execution of his sentence; so that the legal date of our lives may be considerably longer than the term which the Author of our lives hath appointed. But the issue of that trial, which we must undergo at the second appearance of Christ, is of eternal consequence to us. Our final state is determined by it; and no power in heaven or on earth is able to defeat or alter the sentence.

And is it possible that we can banish the thoughts of this for one moment, or that we can think of it with cold and unaffected hearts? The

Second thing that deserves the peculiar notice of believers, is the gracious design of our Lord's appearance. —“He shall appear the second time unto salvation.”

Some may, perhaps, be at a loss to conceive what should remain to be done for the salvation of the saints, after their souls are admitted into heaven. But if we reflect a little, we shall be sensible, that even after the soul's admission into heaven, there are several things to be done by Christ for his people, which will increase their happiness, and render their salvation more perfect.—For,

1st, At his second coming, Christ will raise the dead bodies of his servants, which will, without doubt, be a considerable addition to their felicity. The souls of the saints are represented in Scripture as waiting and longing for the resurrection of their bodies. Hence their flesh is said to rest in hope; and, therefore, when this hope is fulfilled at Christ's second appearance, we may justly conclude, that the joy of the soul shall be heightened and improved; especially when we consider the wonderful change which shall be wrought upon the body itself. When, in the morning of the resurrection, the trumpet shall sound, and the graves shall be opened; when that which was sown in weakness and dishonour, shall be raised in power and glory; when the formerly vile body shall not only be refined, but fashioned like unto the glorious body of the Redeemer, with what triumph and exultation shall that song be sung! “Death is swallowed up in victory.”—“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2dly. In that day the Church, which is called the body of Christ, shall be complete; which must add to the happiness of every saint in particular. For the several members of that spiritual body being closely united, not only to the head, but also to one another, each of them must necessarily partake of the happiness and glory of the whole. Must not every child of God be more joyful when the whole family is assembled in the immediate presence of their Father, and not one member is wanting? If there is joy in heaven at the conversion of one sinner, though afterwards he hath a waste and howling wilderness to pass through, and many a toilsome and dangerous step to take, ere he arrive at the end of his journey; how much greater joy shall there be in the heavenly Jerusalem, when the many sons of God are all brought home to glory?

3dly. Then also shall believers be solemnly acquitted by the Judge himself, and publicly acknowledged in the presence of an assembled world. “They shall be mine,” saith the Lord, “in that day when I make up my jewels.” Having washed them with his blood, and sanctified them by his Spirit, he will not be ashamed to call them brethren, but will confess them before his Father, and present them at his throne without spot and blemish.—And

4thly, To complete the happiness of the saints, then shall there be the clearest discovery of all God’s works, and the most full and open manifestation of his glorious perfections. When all his great designs are accomplished and brought to their intended issue, then shall the wise order, and harmonious contexture, of divine Providence be clearly discerned, the most intricate and perplexed dispensations shall be explained and vindicated; and it shall then appear, to the full conviction of the

whole admiring family of God, that all things have wrought together for their spiritual improvement and eternal felicity. This shall be the day of solemn triumph, the grand jubilee, upon the finishing of all God's works from the creation of the world, upon which ensues the resignation of the Mediator's kingdom. For although Christ shall continue through eternity to be the head of his church, yet the present manner of his administration shall then cease. He shall then deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God, or the undivided Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, may be all in all. This fact is distinctly asserted (1 Cor. xv. 24—28.) "Then cometh the end," saith the Apostle, "when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith that all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."

Thus you have heard how Christ's second coming shall complete the salvation of his people, and increase that happiness at the resurrection which commenced at their new birth; and which, though greatly improved by the release of the soul from the earthly tabernacle, was not carried to its full perfection at death.—The manner of our Lord's appearance, when he comes upon this gracious design, is the

Third particular in the text, which comes now to be considered, "He shall appear the second time, *without*

sin, unto salvation." When in the fulness of time God sent forth his Son into this world, although he was absolutely pure and spotless in himself, yet then he "bare the sins of many;" and "he who knew no sin, was made sin for us." Appearing in the likeness of sinful flesh, he was numbered with transgressors, and treated as if he had been the worst of criminals: But by his sufferings and death, having fully expiated the guilt of sin, he obtained a public and legal discharge, by being released from the prison of the grave, and "set at the right hand of God in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." When, therefore, he cometh again, he shall appear "*without sin*," without that guilt which was charged upon him, while he sustained the character of Surety, and stood in the place of sinful man.

He shall likewise appear without any of the effects of sin, such as pain, poverty, reproach, or infirmity of any kind. It shall not be such an appearance as his first was, when he "made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant," and submitted to all the indignities attending that mean condition. He will not come to be buffeted and scourged, and spit upon, and crowned with thorns. He will not come, O careless and ungrateful sinners! to be despised and rejected in all his gracious offers. No; he shall come in the clouds, with great power and glory; he shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels; he shall appear in all the splendour of Zion's King, arrayed with that glory which he had with the Father before the world was. Then shall the reproach of the cross be wiped off, and all his sufferings fully recompensed. In this humble state, he was attended by twelve poor and illiterate

men; but then shall he come with "ten thousands of his saints, and all the holy angels with him." He was introduced to his public ministry by the "voice of one crying in the wilderness;" but then shall his approach be announced by the "voice of the archangel and the trump of God." And he who on Mount Calvary was lifted up on the cross between two thieves, shall then ascend his "great white throne, high and lifted up;" from whence, with unerring wisdom, and almighty power, he shall separate the righteous from the wicked, adjudging the one to everlasting life, and the other to endless misery.

Thus shall he appear, when he "comes the second time, without sin, unto salvation." And ought not the prospect of this to have a mighty influence upon us in the mean time? "Behold he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." How great will be the confusion of ungodly men, when they see that Jesus, whose grace they despised, coming to fix their everlasting state. The multitude that came determined to apprehend him in the days of his flesh, went backward, and fell to the ground, when, with an air of majesty, he only pronounced these few words, "I am he." And if the Lamb's voice was so terrible, how dreadful will he appear when he roareth as a lion? If his voice shook the earth when he published the law from Mount Sinai, how must it shake the hearts of his enemies, when he pronounceth the sentence of the law, and dooms to those punishments which the law hath awarded?

But the prospect of this appearance is no less comfortable to believers, than it is terrible to the ungodly. Then shall his own people lift up their heads, and be-

hold his glory with exceeding joy. His coming shall be to them the dawning of an everlasting day. They know that he brings salvation with him, the full harvest of that light and gladness which were sown for them in time. He comes to wipe away all tears from their eyes, to complete their victory over death and hell, and to put their whole persons, souls and bodies, in full possession of that heavenly inheritance, “which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.”

If it is comfortable at present to hear of him, to think of his love, to commemorate his death, and to behold his beauty in the ordinances of his grace; what must it be to see him in all the glory of his exalted state? When a dear relation, who hath been long absent in a far country, returns to his kindred and friends, how do all concerned hasten to meet him, and to express their joy at his arrival? And will not the saints then rejoice at the coming of their Saviour? With what transports of gladness will they cry out, Behold, yonder he comes! He whose blood hath redeemed, and whose Spirit hath sanctified us. Yonder he comes in whom we trusted, and for whom we have long waited; and now we see that he hath not deceived us, and that he hath not made us wait in vain. “Even so come, Lord Jesus.”—And this leads me to the

Fourth and last particular in the text, which is the character of those to whom this second appearance of our Lord shall be comfortable. They are such as “look for him.” This short but significant description may be considered as including,

1st, A firm belief of this event. One who looks for it in the sense of the Apostle’s words, is as thoroughly persuaded of its certainty, as he is that the sun, which sets to-night, shall rise again to-morrow. His faith is

built on the surest foundation, the word and promise of his Saviour himself; and, therefore, his heart is impressed with Christ's second appearance as much, at least as really, as if he already saw him coming in the clouds of heaven. But,

2dly, The expression denotes the love and desire of this event. The saints take pleasure in the prospect of it, and accordingly are described by the apostle Paul, (2 Tim. iv. 8.) by this very circumstance. They are such as "love his appearing." If the saints under the old dispensation longed for the manifestation of our Lord in the flesh, how much more ought we to long for that more glorious appearance which he shall make in the end of the world. The Atheist rejects this doctrine altogether; the profane scoffer says, "Where is the promise of his coming?" Carnal sinners are afraid of it, when alarmed with the rebukes of conscience; as when Paul preached of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. But to the godly it is not matter of terror, but of delight. Nay, they would even hasten its approach, if it were in their power. A believer, when his heart is right, will say, like the mother of Sisera, when she cried through the lattice, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" At the same time,

3dly, This expression imports a patient waiting for his appearance, in spite of all discouragements. Love makes the believer to long; but faith enables patiently to wait for his Lord's coming. What though he dwells in an unkind world, wounded with sharp afflictions, harassed with temptations, and oppressed with a body of sin and death? Yet all this notwithstanding, he still looks and waits with patience and resignation. He knows that the second coming of his Lord will abun-

dantly compensate all his present delays and discouragements; and “that this trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, shall then be found unto praise, and honour, and glory.” But the most essential part of the character of those to whom the second appearance of our Lord shall be comfortable, is, in the

4th and last place, An habitual preparation for this event. They will endeavour “to have their loins girded about, and their lights burning, and themselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.” The best evidence which we can give that we truly look for him with faith and love, is our being diligent, that we may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. As the proper improvement, therefore, of all that hath been said, let me address to you this concluding exhortation. “Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.”—“Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.”—“Let your whole conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ.” Never think “that you have already attained, either are already perfect; but forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—“Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth, that when he who is your life shall appear, ye may also appear with him in glory.” *Amen.*

SERMON LIV.

Preached at the Author's admission at South Leith.

I CORIN. iv. 1, 2.

Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of CHRIST, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.

THE just conception and faithful discharge of the reciprocal duties in society, are the foundation both of private and public happiness. In this respect, the church of Christ is not different from other communities among men. Although Christians acknowledge but one supreme Master, yet they are taught to acknowledge among themselves subordinate degrees of authority on the one hand, and of submission and respect on the other. The God whom we serve is a God of order, not a God of confusion; and he hath pointed out, both in his word and in his providence, the necessity of doing all things decently and in good order. The text, and the occasion likewise, lead me to speak of the mutual regards and duties which ought to subsist between a minister of Christ, and the people committed to his charge; in doing which I shall, through divine assistance,

First, Explain the account given us in the text, of the nature of our office as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. And,

Secondly, Point out the corresponding obligations in-

cumbent on Christians, with regard to those entrusted with this ministry.

The illustration of these particulars will tend to produce a just conception, and I trust, through the blessing of God, the faithful discharge of those important duties which you and I will henceforth owe to each other.

I am *first*, to explain the account given in my text, of the nature of our office as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

And in order to have clear apprehensions of this subject, it will be necessary to look back to the origin of the office, and see wherein it differed, at its first appointment, from the circumstances in which it exists at present. I set out with observing, that the ministry of the word is in all essential points the same, ever since it was ordained as an employment. At the same time it is plain, that several circumstances attending it are considerably varied. The ordinary call to the office, which now takes place, is very different from the miraculous mission by which men were consecrated to it in former times. Their vocation was more immediate, more striking, attended with more ample powers, as well as more splendid effects. From their immediate inspiration, an authority was derived to their words, to which none of us can justly pretend. They promised, and the blessings of time and eternity were conveyed with their words; they threatened, and vengeance from heaven followed without delay. Besides, the first teachers of the gospel enjoyed from their divine Master the communication of his own powers over nature. "Having called the twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, and to heal all manner of sickness and disease." Accordingly, the whole history of their lives is one train of miracles, verifying the reality of these powers, and display-

ing the fulfilment of that splendid promise, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father." All these extraordinary powers have now ceased. The pastors of the Christian church, in these later ages, are neither possessed of the immediate inspiration, nor of the power of working miracles, enjoyed by the apostles. They are now men in all respects like yourselves, to whom God hath conveyed, by the hands of other men, authority to preach the word, to dispense the sacraments, and to preside over the congregations in which his providence may place them. Here then is a very manifest difference, and an evident inferiority on our side. Still, however, the original proposition stands true, that the office is in all essential points the same as exercised both by them and us. For it is easy to conceive, that the superior prerogatives which have been mentioned, vary some circumstances in the ministry only, but do not in any degree alter its nature. The essence of this sacred office, the foundations of the pastoral authority, remained unimpaired. The mission is one and the same by Jesus Christ, to all his faithful servants in this employment. His promise is unalterable, "Behold I am with you always, even to the end of the world." From his holy hill, where he sits as King of Zion, he provides for the perpetuity of his church, "giving some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ."

This then is the origin of that sacred office, which is still exercised among you. This is the source from which the authority is derived that is necessary for sustaining the character. It is this which constitutes our mission

the same with that of the apostles, and confers on the truths which we deliver the authority of the word of God. So that if the doctrines which we set forth are agreeable to the Scriptures, if the morality which we enforce is a conversation becoming the gospel, we are in all respects to be accounted of as “ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.”

But these titles, so ennobling to him who supports them, are not without very solemn considerations to correct the levity of confidence and self-applause. “It is required in stewards,” saith the Apostle, “that a man be found faithful.” What a variety of important duties are included in this requisition? When we speak of a faithful minister, we speak of the rare and happy union of ability and attention, of zeal and knowledge, of meekness and firmness, in the same character; for all these are necessary to sustain the office with propriety. And are these qualities to be attained with a slight degree of application? Is it a small demand on the conscience of a man, to give its testimony to his faithfulness, in such arduous and important respects? These considerations may well give rise to that emphatical question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” especially when to all this we take likewise into view the awful threatenings denounced against the unfaithful discharge of this office. “Son of man,” saith the Almighty to each of us, as he said to his prophets of old, “I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die, and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand. Wo be to the shepherds of Israel that do

feed themselves; should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Thus saith the Lord God, Behold I am against the shepherds, and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock, neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more."

Thus have I endeavoured to set before you the nature of our office, as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. No man can boast of a more honourable employment. At the same time, none can aspire to one that requires higher attention, involves more difficulty, or subjects to a more awful account.

But you are not to imagine, my brethren, that while such high obligations are laid on the ministers of the gospel, no duties are, on the other hand, required of you towards those who hold that station. "Let a man," saith the Apostle, "so account of us as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." The plain meaning of which exhortation is, that Christians are required to entertain sentiments corresponding to that relation in which they stand to those who labour among them in word and doctrine.

I. The same authority which lays such arduous obligations on your pastors, requires of you to entertain a spirit of equity and candour towards them. It is certainly but fair to judge of every person according to the character he assumes, and the pretensions with which he sets out. What these are on our part, you have already heard. I have shown those circumstances in which we acknowledge our inferiority to the first teachers of the gospel. I have pointed out those also, in which we maintain our commission to be equal to theirs. The sum is this, that, on the one hand, we profess ourselves to be no more than ordinary, uninspired, fallible men, like yourselves; but at the same time contend, on the other

hand, that we possess the same authority to preach the doctrines of revelation, and to dispense the ordinances of religion, which the most distinguished apostle ever enjoyed. What we expect then of your equity and candour, is, that you would judge of us on these grounds, and expect nothing from us but what is consistent with them. You may perhaps ask, In what respects there is any danger of your transgressing this rule? To which I answer, *1st*, That this rule is transgressed, when you confine the respect to which the office itself is entitled, entirely to the personal qualities and accomplishments of mind bestowed on those who are invested with it. When I speak of personal qualities, I do not mean that you should understand me as referring to sanctity of conduct. You cannot make any demand on us on this head, beyond what is just and incumbent. God forbid that any of us should incur the application of our Lord's saying, as to the scribes and pharisees: "The scribes and pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not." We acknowledge that we ought to be ensamples to believers, not only in word, but in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. In this respect, therefore, your severest demand do us no injustice. But is there not a want of equity in withholding your respect from those who do not embellish this office with shining and superior endowments of mind? Is not this the very thing against which you are warned, when you are told that you have the treasure of the "gospel in earthen vessels, that the power and excellency may appear to be of God?" Why should it be expected, then, that ministers should understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, even as the superior intelligences of heaven, who stand

before the throne of God? Why should you be dissatisfied, except we can employ all the most exquisite arts of oratory to sooth your ears, and amuse your imaginations? Where are you taught to expect this from us? These are not our pretensions; this is not the character we assume. For let not any man account of us as orators or declaimers, plausible and artificial discoursers, who have nothing in view beyond their own credit, and are eloquent and ingenious by profession. We profess a character more humble indeed, as to any personal importance we can assume from it; but, at the same time, infinitely more serious and weighty, even that of ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. But,

2dly, This rule of equity and candour is transgressed in a still higher degree, when you expect of us to preach doctrines accommodated to your passions, or to refrain from delivering those truths which are unacceptable or alarming. You complain, perhaps, that we disturb your repose, and interrupt your pleasing dreams of happiness; but this complaint is both unjust to us, and injurious to yourselves; and though at first sight it may seem levelled at us, is in truth levelled against God himself. For whose words, I beseech you, are these words: “He that believeth not, shall be damned.”—“If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die.”—“Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.” These, indeed, are alarming sentences; but you will keep it in mind, that they were not devised by us. They are among those mysteries of God, which are entrusted to us as stewards, and surely no less can be expected than that we should dispense them faithfully. God hath assured us, that if we do not speak to warn the wicked from the evil of his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood he will require at our hands. Would you then in

good earnest desire that we should forfeit our own souls, and incur the wrath of Almighty God, from a false tenderness to your delusive peace. No, my brethren, this cannot be done; or if it be done, eternal wo will be our portion, eternal reproaches will pass between us. I had rather hear from one in the spirit of Ahab, "Feed him with the bread and water of affliction;" or from one in the spirit of Amaziah, "Forbear, why shouldst thou be smitten;" than to hear from my own conscience, Thou hast betrayed souls to damnation; than to hear from an incensed God, "Their blood will I require at thine hands;" than to hear from the chief Shepherd, when he shall appear, "Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth." Let a man, therefore, so account of us in the spirit of candour of equity, "as ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."

II. Christians, you are required to entertain a just esteem for the office and character which we bear. I am aware how delicate a subject it is to talk of that estimation which we claim from you on this account. I am sensible that our highest glory consists in our humility, and our best dignity in stooping to be useful: "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake." We claim no obsequious homage, we arrogate not dominion over your faith, but we expect that no man should despise us; we account our office venerable enough to entitle those to respect, who do the duties of it with propriety. Indeed we have not diffidence enough to apprehend, in the least degree, that such respect will be denied, where the proper virtues of our station appear in our conduct; and we know it to be both vain and absurd to expect it on any other terms.

Leaving therefore a theme, which cannot be pursued long to advantage, we are still more desirous,

III. That you would make a proper improvement of the truths which we deliver. Take heed then, brethren, how ye hear. The time is coming, when we must all meet before the judgment-seat of God, to give an account of the advantages which we have enjoyed, and of the manner in which we have improved them. In what way this decisive trial shall be conducted, cannot be certainly known in the present time. We are told in general, that the great Shepherd, who shall then sit in judgment, will separate the sheep from the goats, placing the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. But besides this grand division, it seems probable, from the analogy both of reason and Scripture, that those who were members of the same Christian society, and enjoyed the same ordinances and means of grace, shall then be brought together and confronted, that the evidence upon which the different sentences shall proceed, may be the more unexceptionable and convincing to all. The impenitent sinner shall then have nothing to plead in his own defence, when it shall appear that many of those with whom he lived have been converted and saved by those very means which he neglected and abused. It will be impossible for him to plead any singularity in his own case, when he shall behold some of those persons crowned with glory, whom he remembers to have seen in the same church he frequented, receiving the same ordinances of religion which he did, and who perhaps, in many outward respects, had fewer advantages for salvation than himself. This, my brethren, is a very solemn consideration, and, if duly attended to, can hardly fail to have a powerful influence on our minds. We who are entrusted with the care of your souls, shall then be called to give an account of our stewardship. But you,

too, my dear friends, must then appear with us; and as we must declare the message we have delivered, so you must answer for the reception you gave it. Wo will be unto us if we did not preach the gospel; and if we did, wo will be to you if you did not receive it. In these views, it is no slight or transient relation which was solemnized so lately in this place; and happy indeed will it be, if the same sentence of the Judge shall acquit us both at the great day.

In the mean time, remember, and lay it to heart, that my task is not to please or to amuse you, but to dispense to you the word of life, which is able to save your souls.

Many, I doubt not, will come to this, as to other churches, merely to sit in judgment as critics of the speaker's abilities. But I hope God will save us from an undue respect to any of you in this capacity.

I hope he will save you from that disdainful nicety which scorns to be instructed with plain exhortations. A professed declaimer may justly be censured if he fails to entertain his audience. For this purpose, it is his part to make what excursions he pleaseth into the regions of imagination. But we have a dispensation committed to us, a form of sound words, from which we must not depart; a doctrine which we must deliver with uncorruptness, with gravity, with sincerity. Permit us, therefore, to aim only at the praise of faithfulness, wishing indeed to please you, but at the same time to please you only to edification.

Brethren, pray for us that we may be found faithful. Pray for yourselves, that ye may be able to suffer the word of exhortation, and to profit thereby. And may the great Master of the vineyard watch over us with a propitious care, to direct our labours, and in you to give the increase of fruit unto holiness, and in the end everlasting life. *Amen.*

SERMON LV.

ROMANS vi. 12, 13.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof: neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

THE Apostle had, in the preceding part of the Epistle, opened at great length that fundamental doctrine of our holy religion, the justification of a sinner through faith in Jesus Christ. In the chapter from which the text is taken, he proceeds to guard the Christians to whom he wrote against those false conclusions which they might be in danger of inferring from this doctrine. And, that none might pretend to turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, he shews, with great strength of evidence, that the truths which he had been stating, so far from giving encouragement to a licentious life, on the contrary, laid peculiar obligations on all who embraced them to a strict and universal holiness. This he argues from the nature of Christian baptism, the initiating seal of the covenant of grace, showing, that by this rite we are solemnly engaged to die unto sin and live unto righteousness, in conformity to Christ's death and resurrection, signified in that ordinance. Afterwards he goes on to dissuade them from giving indulgence to sin in any kind or degree, and to enforce the obligations to univer-

sal purity by a variety of weighty arguments. "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body." Sin is said to *reign*, when it bears chief sway in the soul, and the person is wholly subject to its influence. The best and most sanctified Christian on earth hath still some remainder of corruption abiding in him: For perfection doth not belong to the present state; and he that saith he hath no sin, deceiveth himself, and the truth is not in him. The Apostle therefore expresseth himself in this qualified manner, Let not sin *reign* in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Beware of giving way to your sensual appetites, otherwise you forfeit all the comfort of the doctrine which I have been teaching, and must be concluded strangers to that grace of God, which effectually teacheth those who are partakers of it, to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the world."

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof: neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; "but yield yourselves unto God." It is this last exhortation which I propose to make the subject of the present discourse; and I intend, in the

First place, To explain what is implied in yielding ourselves to God;

Secondly, To offer some directions as to the right manner of performing this duty; and

Thirdly, To enforce the exhortation by some arguments.

I begin with explaining the duty itself. And, in general, it implies, that whatever we possess, all that we are, or have, or can do, should be consecrated to God, and devoted to his service and honour. The being which we have is derived from him; every blessing which we en-

joy is the fruit of his bounty; every talent with which we are distinguished was freely bestowed by him. To him, therefore, they ought to be entirely surrendered, and in the advancement of his glory at all times employed. When we serve God with the best of our faculties, and with the most valuable of our possessions, What is the whole amount of our offering? Surely if ever self-complacent thoughts on this point might have been indulged, David might have indulged them, when he, and a willing people with him, offered unto the Lord of their most precious substance with a perfect heart. Yet hear how humbly he speaks of all the costly oblations which he had brought. "Who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort; for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and the earth are thine; thine is the kingdom, and thou art exalted as head above all."

More particularly, we must yield to God our immortal souls, with all the intellectual powers which they possess. We must dedicate our understanding to the Father of Lights, to be illuminated by him with saving knowledge, to be employed in contemplating his nature and perfection; above all, to know Jesus, and him crucified, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. We must dedicate our will to that holy rule of resignation which David expressed when he said, "Here am I, let the Lord do unto me what seemeth good in his sight;" and which David's Lord expressed in circumstances infinitely more trying: "Father, not my will, but thine be done." We must consecrate our memories to be treasuries of divine truth, our affections

to the pursuit of those things which are above, our senses to the salutary discipline of self-denial, and our members as instruments of holiness to God.

All our possessions and enjoyments must be devoted to God. Our wealth and power, our time and our faculties, nay life itself, which is the foundation of all our comforts, must be entirely resigned to him. Neither must we count death itself grievous, so that we finish our course with joy and true honour. We must yield ourselves to God in all capacities and relations wherein his providence may have placed us, and improve the advantages of our different conditions in life for the advancement of his glory. Are we masters or servants, parents or children, pastors or people, rulers or subjects, let us, in all these relations, be devoted to God, and discharge the various duties which result from them with fidelity and zeal, that we may glorify our Father in heaven, who hath appointed to every man his proper work, and will at length demand an account of the manner in which we have performed it.

If it be inquired for what purposes we are thus to yield ourselves unto God, the following particulars will furnish the answer.

1st. We are to yield ourselves to God, to do whatsoever he commands; in all instances of duty, to give a prompt and cheerful obedience to his authority. It ought to be sufficient for us, in every case, to know what God hath pronounced to be an obligation, whatever the world or the flesh may have to say against it. 'This is the true way to keep our minds in a steady decisive frame. "A double minded man is unstable in all his ways." He who seeks to ascertain other points besides his duty, will find himself perplexed with perpetual difficulties. Embarrassed with attending to distracting and opposite

counsels, his conduct will neither be firm nor graceful ; and, even when he does what is right, he will be unable to enjoy the satisfaction of it, conscious that he did it not in that simplicity and godly sincerity which alone can render our obedience acceptable. We are therefore to yield ourselves to God as our supreme Lawgiver, who hath an unquestionable title to the service of all our active powers, saying with Samuel, “ Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth ;” and with the apostle Paul, “ Lord what wilt thou have me to do ?”

2dly. We must yield ourselves to God not only to do but to suffer his will. The rewards of active obedience are not found in the present life : on the contrary, the most faithful servants of God are often visited with the severest dispensations of Providence. We must therefore not only have our loins girt about for cheerful obedience, but our minds prepared also for patient suffering. We must be ready to resign our most valuable possessions, and our dearest comforts, the moment that they are reclaimed by him who at first bestowed them, saying with Job, “ The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord ;” and, with David, “ I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that in very faithfulness thou hast afflicted me.”

We are already in the hand of God, by our essential dependance, as the clay is in the hands of the potter ; let us likewise be so by our own consent and choice. This is the true balm of life. It is this that softens adversity, and alleviates the load of sorrow. In this we unite the noblest duty which we can perform, and the most precious benefits which we can reap. What wisdom can compare with the wisdom of resignation, which not only softens inevitable evils, but turns them into real and permanent good ; which not only soothes the sense of suffering, but secures a happy and a glorious reward.

3dly. We must yield ourselves to God, to be disposed of by his providence, as to our lot and condition in the world. "He hath made of one blood all that dwell upon the face of the earth." He hath fixed the precise issues of life and death, and hath appointed where we shall dwell, and what station we shall occupy in the world. To one he saith, Be thou a king; and to another, Be thou a beggar. All these things come forth of the Lord of Hosts; and in his will we must cheerfully acquiesce, with a firm and meek resolution to be disposed of as he sees meet, and to glorify him in the place and station which he hath assigned us; to serve him cheerfully, while he hath service for us to perform in this world; and at last to resign our souls into his hands, when he shall require them.

4thly. As we must be resigned to the will of God with respect to our outward lot, so we must be satisfied with his disposal, as to the measure of spiritual gifts which he is pleased to bestow on us. Should he make us but as the foot, we must be as well contented as if he had made us the hand or the head, and rejoice that we are found qualified for being even the least honourable member in Christ's mystical body. We must not envy our brother for being wiser or better than we, more than for being richer or nobler. And though we may covet earnestly the best gifts, yet if, in the use of appointed means, we cannot attain to them, we ought, with resignation to the Father of lights, to make a diligent and faithful use of what God hath given us, trusting that they who have been good stewards over a little, shall not fail to receive their proportional reward in the day of retribution. Every vessel of honour hath not the same capacity, but every vessel of honour shall be completely filled. None shall have a mean station in the

heavenly temple, although some shall be more gloriously distinguished than others. They shall all be kings and priests unto God, and mansions shall not be wanting to accommodate every class of guests in the New Jerusalem.

I proceed now to give you some directions as to the manner in which we ought to perform this duty, of yielding ourselves unto God.

I. Before we can perform this duty in an acceptable manner, it is necessary that we have just views both of God and of ourselves. In a particular manner, we must have a deep sense both of our original apostacy, and of the actual transgressions with which we are chargeable. We must yield ourselves to God, like condemned rebels, who cast themselves on the mercy of their sovereign. Yet while we are sensible of our miserable and condemned state, we must also have a view of those riches of mercy which are open to the chief of sinners. We are to remember, with faith and gratitude, that God so loved the world, as to send his only begotten Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might have life; that he only is the way, the truth, and the life; that he is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by him; that in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and that he is made of God to all that believe on him, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. The knowledge of these fundamental truths must influence the surrender which we make of ourselves to God, that it may be an act of our understanding, accompanied both with humility and with hope. But,

II. We must yield ourselves unto God with serious, attentive, and awakened minds. It is seldom that any permanent good is obtained, in consequence of a hasty choice. Even when the object of our choice is just and

valuable, our esteem of it is apt to decline, if it has been embraced at first with too rash and violent an affection. In proportion as the charms of novelty fade, our attachment to it subsides, and indifference or aversion succeed to the eagerness of a prompt and hasty passion. If therefore we would prove steadfast and faithful, we must not be precipitate, but weigh every circumstance with care, and ponder well ere we fix our choice. We must remember, that yielding ourselves to God, will involve in it the renouncing of many favourite engagements, the performing of many difficult duties, and the mortifying of many desires, which hitherto, perhaps, it has been the whole plan of our lives to gratify. Let us, therefore, represent to ourselves the probable consequences, before we embark in so important and solemn a transaction. Consider the self-reproach, the censures of others, and, above all, the displeasure of God, which you must incur, if you retract from such a deep engagement. God doth not wish to ensnare you into his service. He does not allure you by flattering prospects of ease. He does not conceal from you the hardships which you must endure. It is plainly therefore his will, that ye should consider these things, and that before ye devote yourselves to him, ye should count the cost, and see whether ye are able to fulfil the engagement.

3dly. In yielding ourselves unto God, our hearts must be humbled with serious and deep repentance, for having so long gone astray from him and his service. We ought to imitate the example of those penitents mentioned in the 50th chapter of Jeremiah, (verse 4.) “In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping, they shall go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with

their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall never be forgotten." God will not accept of us, unless we be truly weary of our burden, and sensible of our absolute need of a Saviour. To such, the calls of the gospel are peculiarly addressed: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

4thly. We must yield ourselves unto God without any secret reserve or limitation, imploring that he may take the full possession of our hearts, and cast out of them whatever opposeth or exalteth itself against him. We ought to say to him, "O Lord, our Lord, other lords have had dominion over us; but henceforth we will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only." He who hath only consistent pursuits, may follow them with a prospect of success; but a mind divided between contrary principles of action, can expect nothing but to be for ever drawn backward and forward, as they happen alternately to prevail. In this view it is impossible to yield ourselves to God, if at the same time we yield ourselves to sin in any degree. Perhaps indeed we propose to dedicate ourselves to God in general, and only to spare ourselves the mortification of renouncing a few trifling indulgences. But these indulgences have unforeseen connexions with others that are not trifling, and these again with more. Or supposing that they had not, yet the truth certainly is, that when we deliberately become unfaithful to our consciences in any one instance, we lose every firm ground on which we can withstand

temptation in any other instance. We lose gradually both the power and inclination to resist evil. God withdraws the good aids of his Spirit, we decline from evil to worse, and our last state becomes worse than our first. Such only, therefore, as yield themselves wholly to God, and acknowledge, after all, that they are but unprofitable servants, entitled to acceptance only through the merits of a gracious Redeemer, have cause to hope well. All others build on the sand, but they on a rock. Their superstructure may be raised to the greatest height, and stands both firm and graceful. God will pardon their unavoidable infirmities, and assist their endeavours. They will of course make continual progress, and for every step of that progress enjoy an increase of peace and joy here, and of unfading glory hereafter.

5thly. All this must be done with an explicit regard to the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom alone we have access to the Father: "For there is none other name given under heaven whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus." Without this Mediator, God could have no friendly intercourse with man. The weapons of our rebellion must be surrendered into his hands; for it is in him alone that God reconciles the world unto himself. It is by the blood of Jesus that we have boldness to enter into the holiest. We are accepted only in the beloved. The Father receives no offering but at the hand of this great High Priest.

HAVING thus explained the duty of yielding ourselves unto God, and shewn in what way it ought to be performed, what remains but that I enforce the exhortation by some motives and arguments.

Need I to represent to you the necessity of this duty? Can you withdraw yourselves from being the property of God as his creatures? Can you evade the dispensations

of his providence, or snatch from him those issues of life and death, which are incontrollably in his hands? If so, then you may consult whether you should yield yourselves to him or not? But if your present and your eternal happiness depends on his favour; if you cannot secure an interest in his favour otherwise than by complying with this exhortation; if you must otherwise be left to struggle as you best can, with all the evils of life, and at last be banished his presence for ever, to spend a miserable eternity with reprobate spirits, what choice is left? Can you hesitate a moment to comply with what you cannot alter, and to surrender yourselves to Him, who will either glorify himself in you as vessels of mercy, or as vessels prepared for destruction?

Consider, in the 2d place, the reasonableness of this duty. This is the argument of the Apostle to the Romans: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." And what can be so reasonable as to consecrate to God that being, those faculties, those possessions and enjoyments, which we derive from his bounty. If there is reasonableness in acknowledging our debts, and in being thankful for our benefits; if there is reasonableness in submitting to be guided by unerring wisdom, and to be disposed of by infinite goodness; in a word, if there be any thing superior in reasonableness to any other that reason requires, it is this, that we should yield ourselves to that God who made us, who preserves and hath redeemed us, and hath pledged his faithfulness to conduct all those to happiness who put their confidence in him. And this leads me to the last argument which I shall use for enforcing this exhortation, which is the advantage with which it will be attended. At the same

time that we yield ourselves to God, he gives himself to us in all the fulness of his grace; for this is the tenor of his well ordered covenant, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people." And what an infinite portion is this? If all the treasures of grace were open to our choice, would it be possible for to pitch on any blessing so rich and compendious as this, that God would accept of us as his property, and provide for us as he provides for his own? Surely then we cannot want any good thing. His wisdom can guide us through all the perplexing paths of life; his power can support us in every danger and difficulty; and his goodness is more than sufficient to bestow on us all things richly to enjoy.

I have only to add, that the exhortation in the text belongs in an especial manner to you who are as yet in early and vigorous years. Now your understandings are capable of the firmest impressions. Now your wills are most pliable. Now your affections are most patient of discipline. Now your bodies are most useful to your minds. Now your minds are most unfettered, and your whole man most susceptible of good impressions, and most capable of exerting them in action. Lose not, therefore, your irrecoverable advantage. Answer now when God calls you with most affection. Offer yourselves while you are most worth the offering. Govern your appetites before the evil day come. Now you may gird them, and carry them whither you will; but if you neglect this precious season, they will hereafter gird you, and carry you whither you would not. An early virtue is the most worthy and valuable offering, honoured and blessed with the kindest acceptance of God. But when a man shall look into himself, and find his faculties depraved and weakened, stained with the pollution, wearied with the service, sick with the disappointments, and

darkened with the impostures of sin, how comfortless a task must he have in preparing an offering to God from among such a lame and diseased herd. “Remember therefore now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, ere the evil days come, and the years draw nigh in which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. *Amen.*”

SERMON LVI.

Preached on a Day of Humiliation before Celebrating the Lord's Supper.

LUKE xviii. 19.

—*He that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*

AS man fell by *pride*, it is reasonable to conclude that he can only rise again by *humility*: and here we are taught that this is the express ordination and appointment of God; for thus saith the faithful and true Witness, “Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” I cannot therefore employ your time to better purpose, especially upon such an occasion as this, than in opening the nature of true humiliation, and endeavouring to illustrate the necessity and use of it, to prepare our hearts for those enriching communications both of mercy and grace, which our Saviour, in this passage, encourageth us to expect.

I BEGIN with opening the nature of true humiliation. This takes its rise from spiritual discoveries of the evil of

sin, as the transgression of a law which is holy, just, and good; as an act of outrageous and unprovoked rebellion against the mildest, as well as the most righteous administration; as the basest ingratitude to our kindest Benefactor, the Author of our being, and of all that we possess; and especially as it renders us unlike to him who is not only the standard but the source of perfection, and consequently incapable of any friendly correspondence with the Father of our spirits, the Fountain of light, of life, and of joy.

These spiritual discoveries of the evil of sin, produce a fixed and solid apprehension of our own ill deserving because of it. We see the justice of the sentence which condemns us, and cannot help acknowledging that we are unworthy of the least of all God's mercies, and liable to that tremendous wrath which is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. Hence arise grief and shame, and all that inward distress which necessarily attend the consciousness of guilt, the present sense of forfeited happiness, and the fearful prospect of that unknown misery which awaits transgressors in the world to come.

To all which must be added, such a deep conviction of our utter inability to do any thing that can be effectual for our own recovery, as issues in a despair of relief from every other quarter but the free mercy of God, extended to sinners through Jesus Christ, and the effectual operation of his renewing grace. We are not truly humbled till we feel ourselves wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, equally destitute of righteousness and strength, incapable of making any satisfaction for past offences, and having no power of our own to rectify that fatal disorder in our frame, which is the bitter fruit of our apostacy from God.

Such was the state of the publican's mind, who is presented to our view in the foregoing parable, as an approved example for our imitation; whilst the Pharisee, who trusted in himself that he was righteous, standing apart from his fellow-worshippers, as one who disdained to hold communion with them, boldly addressed the Divine Majesty, and, under the specious form of thanksgiving, poured forth the pride and uncharitableness of his heart. The publican, we are told, stood afar off; and, though his face was turned towards the mercy-seat, yet, conscious of his unworthiness, he would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smiting upon his breast, as the seat of his disease and pain, from whence he despaired of fetching any relief, he as it were flies from himself to the God of all grace, and gives vent to his penitent and humble hope, in these few but emphatical words, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But the nature of true humiliation will more fully appear from the salutary purposes for which it is intended, which was the

Second thing I proposed to illustrate; and hence likewise we shall discover how necessary it is, in order to our regaining that happiness we have forfeited. And,

I. It is of use to disgrace and mortify carnal self, that usurping idol which sits on the throne of God, and reigns in the heart of every natural man. Herein lies the essence of man's apostacy. He is fallen from God to self. Dissatisfied with the rank which God had assigned him, he attempted to break loose from the Author of his being, and to seize upon knowledge, immortality, and happiness, without any dependance upon the hand that formed him. This my brethren, is the original disease of our nature; in this consisteth the sinfulness and the misery of man. He loveth himself supremely,

he liveth to himself ultimately: the genuine language of his heart is, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?"

He begins indeed to alter his tone, when conviction, like an armed man, forceth its way into his soul; then he feels his dependance, and wisheth to be at peace with that Being whom he finds he is unable to resist. For this end he will part, at least for a season, with many of the members of the body of sin. Nay, so far as the external act extends, there are few duties perhaps which he will not consent to perform. But, when he is driven from the outworks, he only retires to the chief fortress of sin. Still self is worshipped in a different form; and, though he sees that it cannot possess the throne by violence, yet he hopes that it may be able to purchase it with a price. Thus the homage that was paid to sinful self, is only transferred to righteous self; and now the idol which was formerly black as hell, being white-washed, and decked with some forms of godliness, is permitted to wield the sceptre in peace, till either grace or vengeance wipe off the false colouring, and stripping the deceiver of his gorgeous apparel, cast him down to the ground, and put a final period to his usurped domination.

Of all the parts of mortification, self-denial is by far the most painful and difficult; indeed all the rest are virtually contained in it. Were it only riches or honours, or even the fruit of the body for the sin of the soul, a carnal mind, stung with remorse, and terrified with the prospect of impending wrath, might be brought to part with them; but to part with his all, with his life, with his self, this indeed is a hard saying, and more than enough to make him go away sorrowful.

Now herein appeareth the end and the necessity of

such humiliation as I endeavoured to describe. This layeth the whole load upon self, and breaketh the very heart of the old man; it setteth the house on fire, in which we both trusted and delighted, and maketh us not only to see, but to feel that it is time for us to abandon it, lest we be consumed. This then is the first office of humiliation, to hide pride from our eyes, by showing us that we are our own destroyers, and giving us such discoveries of our guilt and pollution, that we are made to abhor ourselves in dust and in ashes, and to cry out with the publican, God be merciful to us sinners. This leads me to mention a

Second, and more salutary end of humiliation, which indeed may be called its ultimate end, because the self-annihilation I have been speaking of, derives its chief importance from its tendency to promote it, and that is, true humiliation prepares the soul for the honourable reception of Christ and his grace.

I say, for the *honourable* reception of Christ; it is not meet that he should come into an unhumbled heart; for, though his errand be to heal us, yet he must have the welcome that is due to a physician. He comes indeed to save us, but he comes at the same time to be honoured in our salvation. Though his grace be free, yet he will not expose it to contempt, but have the fulness and the freedom of it acknowledged and glorified. Faith indeed accepts the gift, but then it must be a humble faith that is sensible of its worth; a thankful faith, that magnifieth the Giver; and an obedient faith, that will practically improve the mercy bestowed. Christ hath no grace so free as to save those who neither feel their need of it, nor know its worth. Christ's benefits are not applied in the same way they were purchased. When he came to ransom us, he consented to be a sufferer; for then he bore

our griefs, and carried our sorrows; the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him, as the substitute and surety of guilty man; but when he comes, by his saving grace, into the soul, he will not then be entertained with contempt. He came in the flesh on purpose to be humbled; but, when he comes in the spirit, it is that he may be exalted. On the cross he was reputed a sinner, and bore the punishment that was due to sin; but, in the soul, he is the conqueror of sin, and comes to take possession of his own, and therefore must be treated according to his dignity. It was the hour and power of darkness while he suffered; but, when he enters into the heart by his quickening spirit, that is the hour of triumph, and the prevailing power of heavenly light; and, therefore, though in the flesh he submitted to contempt and reproach, yet he will not endure to be slighted in the soul. No; there he must be enthroned in our most reverend esteem, and crowned with our highest gratitude and love. The cross must there be the portion of his enemies. The crown and sceptre which he purchased must be yielded to him; and every thought must be captivated to the obedience of his will.

This is the end of humiliation, to employ the soul for the fuller entertainment of the Lord that brought it; to prepare the way before him; to whip the buyers and sellers out of the living temples of our hearts, that they may become holiness to the Lord, a fit habitation for the King of Glory.

From this account of the nature and use of humiliation, you may be able to judge what measure of it is absolutely necessary. It must at least go so deep as to undermine our pride, and bring us so low, that the blood of Christ, and the favour of God, shall become more precious in our esteem, than all the riches, and honours,

and pleasures of a present world. At the same time, we must beware of ascribing to our own humiliation any part of the office of Christ, or of the honour that is due to him. We must not think that we can recommend ourselves to the favour of God by the worth of our sorrows, though we should weep even tears of blood. It is not true humiliation, if it lead us not wholly beyond ourselves, to seek pardon and life from Christ alone; and, therefore, it would be a plain contradiction, if humiliation should assume the place of satisfaction and merit, or be in any degree relied upon instead of the Saviour, or so much as associated with him in procuring our salvation.

Hence likewise we learn, that humiliation becomes excessive, and counteracts its chief end, when it confines our attention so entirely to our own unworthiness, as to darken our views of gospel grace, and prevent or obstruct our application to Christ. But as few, comparatively speaking, err upon this side, I shall rather take occasion, from what has been said, to point out some of the symptoms of the opposite extreme, and then call upon those whose humiliation, upon trial, shall appear to be defective, to beg of God the blessing of a broken and contrite heart, which is the professed design of our assembling together this day.

1st, then, They may certainly conclude that they are not sufficiently humbled, who suffer their hearts to be lifted up with their duties or attainments, and are not suitably affected with those imperfections and blemishes which necessarily cleave to their best performances. The true Christian grows downward in humility, in the same proportion that he abounds in the fruits of righteousness. The nearer he approaches to a holy God, the more clearly he discovers his own guilt and pollution. Thus holy

Nehemiah, after he had been recounting, to the praise of divine grace, the many eminent services he had been enabled to do for the church, addresses to God this humble prayer, “O spare me, according to the greatness of thy mercy!”

2d. When you are apt to murmur and repine, because your duties are not accompanied with a present reward; when you are ready to say, in the language of the Jews of old, “Wherefore have we fasted and prayed, and thou regardest not;” this is another symptom that secretly you entertain an opinion of some worthiness in yourselves; for, where nothing is due, there can be no right to complain when the favour is either delayed or refused.

3d. When you begin to think that any of Christ’s sayings are hard, and to wish that his laws were less strict and extensive, and are hesitating whether you should yield to them or not; when you are unwilling to take up his cross, and to forsake all for the hopes of glory, but are set upon a thriving course in the world, and suffer your hearts to be overcharged with the cares of this life, and are cumbered about many things through your own choice, this shows that you are not yet sufficiently humbled, otherwise you would not stand thus trifling with Christ; and, if God have mercy upon you, he will bring you down, abase your earthly appetite, teach you to know that one thing is needful, and constrain you to choose the better part.

4th. When you grow heartless and dull in the service of God, and relish no sweetness in the exercises of religion; when you begin to be indifferent about communion with God, and have little anxiety to know whether your services be accepted; when you can pray without looking after your prayers, and attend upon ordinances al-

most merely from custom, or to keep conscience quiet, without a real concern to find God in them, or to receive benefit from them; especially if you are so far indifferent about the spiritual consolation of the saints, that vain company, or amusing diversions, can make up for the want of them, and keep your minds easy and satisfied without them; it must be obvious to yourselves, that you need a sharper rod than you have ever yet felt, that you may be effectually taught to know your true home, and to take greater pleasure in the fellowship of your Father and brethren, than in strangers and enemies to God and your own souls. Once more, in the

5th place, When, instead of feeding upon ordinances, and receiving them thankfully, you rather pick quarrels with them, and those that dispense them; when you cannot bear to have your faults laid open, but hate and revile the faithful reprove; when you grow censorious and uncharitable, like the Pharisee in the context, treating others with contempt, aggravating their failings, and extenuating their graces; especially when men begin to grow wanton in matters of religion, itching after novelities, and affecting singularity; when they think themselves fitter to teach than to learn, and that the church is not pure or good enough for their company: all this cries aloud for farther humiliation. And, when it shall please God to lead them into the chambers of imagery, and expose the hidden contents of them to their view, he will make them to stoop to the very persons whom once they slighted, and to judge themselves unworthy of the communion of those whom they formerly despised as unworthy of theirs.

These are a few marks by which I would have you to try yourselves; and, if you find that any of them are partly applicable to you, or, if by any other means you

can discover that pride and self-exaltation still retain too much power in your hearts, let me now beseech you to cry earnestly to God for that humble and contrite spirit which he expressly requires, and hath graciously promised to accept.

Grief, I know, is an unwelcome guest to nature; but grace can see reason to bid it welcome, as a necessary consequence of our past sins, and an essential preparative for our future recovery.

You will submit to the severest regimen, and take the most loathsome potions, for the health of your bodies; and should you not submit to the bitterest sorrows, and the keenest rebukes, for the saving of your souls. It is true, as I formerly observed, that your deepest humiliation merits nothing, and can make no amends to God for your sins; neither is it for any want of sufficiency in the blood of Christ that it is required; but it is part of the fruit of his blood upon your souls; for if his blood do not melt and break your hearts, you have no part in him.

Consider whence you are coming. Is it not from a state of enmity against God? and is it decent, is it ingenuous, to leave such a state, without lamenting that you staid in it so long?

Consider what sorrows they be which these sorrows are intended to prevent, and what those are now suffering in hell, who felt not this godly sorrow upon earth. Yours have hope, but theirs are sharpened with despair; yours are medicinal, but theirs are tormenting; yours are of short duration, but theirs are eternal. Grudge not then at the opening of a vein, when so many shall bleed at the heart for ever. Besides, who was it that brought you to the necessity of this sorrow? Who was it that sinned, and laid in the fuel of after remorse? God did not do this. All the pain you can feel, is of your own

preparation. God only undoes what you have been doing.

Consider farther, that you have a wise and tender-hearted physician, who perfectly knows what sorrow and grief are; for he himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with griefs, and is therefore disposed to pity them that are in sorrow. He delighteth not in your trouble, but in your cure and after consolation, and therefore you may be assured that he will deal gently with you, and put no more bitterness into the cup than is necessary for your recovery. He was sent to heal the broken hearted, and he invites the labouring and heavy laden to come to him for rest. When he hath wounded you, he will bind up your wounds as tenderly as you can desire. He hath not indeed that blind fondness for you which you have for yourselves. He will not be so cruelly merciful as to save you from that sorrow which is necessary to save your souls from perdition; but at the same time, he will not suffer you to taste one drop of vinegar and gall, nor to shed one tear, but what tends to your future comfort and joy.

Remember that the more you are humbled after a godly sort, the sweeter will Christ and all his benefits be to you while you live. One taste of his healing love will make you bless those medicinal sorrows that prepared for it. Christ is not equally esteemed by all whom he will save; and would you not rather be yet more emptied of yourselves now, that hereafter you may be fuller of Christ and his grace; for our Saviour here assures us in the text, that a thorough humiliation is a certain forerunner of future exaltation. "Every one that humbleth himself shall be exalted." When men propose to build high, they dig deeper for the foundation. Paul was laid exceeding low at his conversion, that he

might be better fitted for the important services to which he had afterwards the honour to be called.

Let these considerations reconcile you to the humbling work of the Spirit of God. And if any thing you have heard hath touched your hearts, seek not relief among foolish companions, but retire to your closets, and on your bended knees beseech the Lord to perfect the good work he hath begun; and He who comforteth those that are cast down, will not leave you in the Red Sea, but carry you safely through to the farther side, and put the Song of Moses and of the Lamb into your mouths, “giving you beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” *Amen.*

SERMON LVII.

Preached after the Celebration of the Lord's Supper.

PSALM CXIX. 173, 174, 175.

Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me.

THESE words were immediately addressed to God, most High, whose workmanship we all are, even to him that quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things that be not as though they were. Here David appeals to the Searcher of hearts, and lays before him not the product

of his own labour and skill, as though he possessed something whereof he might glory before God, but what he gratefully acknowledges to be the doing of the Lord; a heart in some measure renewed after his image, and panting after a nearer and still more perfect resemblance.

I shall therefore consider this account, which, in the form of a solemn address to God, the Psalmist here gives of his own temper and conduct, as an approved model or pattern for our imitation. What this holy man was, that ought we to be; and such we shall certainly endeavour to be, if we aspire to the character whereby David was distinguished by the Supreme Judge himself, when he dignified him with the most honourable of all appellations, even that of the man after his own heart.

The passage contains,

I. The distinguishing character. And,

II. The leading requests of a truly godly man.

Each of these I shall briefly illustrate and improve; the one for the present trial, and the other for the future direction, of those who have this day made a public profession of their faith in Christ, over the sacred symbols of his broken body and shed blood, in the holy sacrament of his supper.

I BEGIN with the distinguishing character of a truly godly man; and you will observe the following particulars distinctly marked, viz. The matter of his choice—The object of his desires—and, The source of his joy.

The godly man's choice—is the precepts of God. David had said, (verse 3.) That he had chosen the testimonies of God for his heritage; by which he probably meant the promises of that everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, to which he afterwards resorted in the immediate prospect of death, as all his salvation, and all his desire. These promises are indeed exceed-

ing great and precious, suited to all the necessities of the saints, and extending to every blessing that can be denoted by these two significant and most comprehensive words, GRACE and GLORY. But one may choose, or rather covet, the heritage of a child, who hath an aversion to the duties that result from that relation; and therefore the choosing the *law* or *precepts* of God, for regulating the heart and life, is, of all others, the most discriminating character of a true child of God; for there can be no doubt, that one who sincerely devotes himself to the service of God, will most sincerely and ardently wish to be happy in the possession of the promised inheritance.

Let us next attend to the object of the godly man's desire. "I have longed," said David, "for thy salvation;" a present salvation from the guilt and power of sin; and future salvation, in the full and everlasting enjoyment of God in heaven. David was already possessed of the first of these; for he spake from his own experience, when he said, "blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." He had the happiness to be a partaker both of pardoning mercy and of sanctifying grace; yet still he longed for more of this salvation, that is, for a more assured faith of pardoning mercy, and larger measures of sanctifying grace. It is a just observation, with respect to earthly things, that NATURE is contented with a little, and GRACE with less. But it is quite the reverse as to spiritual things. Here grace is not contented with a little; on the contrary, it is insatiable; the more it hath received, the more it desires to receive. Enjoyment, instead of surfeiting, sharpens the appetite. Nay, so sweet is their relish, that every renewed taste of it abates and quenches the thirst for other things. "There be many

that say, who will shew us any good?" This is the voice of the mere child of Adam. But what saith the new man in Christ? "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after.—As the hart panteth for the brooks of water, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.—Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee."

This leads us forward to the source of the godly man's joy. "Thy law," saith David, "is my delight." Here he chooses the term *law* for denoting the whole revelation of God's will, to remind us of the inseparable connexion between privilege and duty, faith and obedience, holiness and comfort; and to teach us, that we ought to be thankful to God for the direction he hath given us in the road to heaven, no less than for the promises by which we are assured of the possession of it. But what I would chiefly observe is, that the joy of a saint is not extracted from such base and perishing materials as corn, and wine, and oil; it flows spontaneously from the fountain of living water, from the pure source of that word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. Nay, so little is it dependant upon, or even connected with, any thing that belongs to a present world, that "although the fig-tree should not blossom, neither should fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive should fail, and the fields should yield no meat; the flock should be cut off from the fold, and there should be no herd in the stall;" yet still the saint can rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of his salvation. Nay, when the heaven shall be shrivelled up like a scrawl when it is rolled together, and every mountain and island shall be moved out of their places; he can look at the universal desolation, and say, when these materials are consumed, I shall have lost nothing. "All things are mine, for I am Christ's, and Christ is

God's.—God lives, blessed be my rock—The Lord is the portion of my inheritance,” and in him I possess and enjoy all things.

These three particulars, respecting the matter of the godly man's choice, the object of his desire, and the source of his joy, may help us to form a just estimate of ourselves; and this is the improvement I would have you to make of this branch of the subject.

How are your hearts affected towards the precepts of God's word? an outward reluctant obedience there may be, compelled by the slavish fear of wrath: but do you serve God from choice, with a free and liberal mind? Doth the Lord Jesus appear as amiable with the crown upon his head, and the sceptre in his hand, as when clad with his garments rolled in blood?

Is salvation, in all its extent, the chief object of your desire? even the present salvation of an inward growing light, and love, and purity; as well as the future salvation of deliverance from the fire that is not quenched, and the enjoyment of those positive pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.

Do you know what it is to hunger and thirst after righteousness? “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the spirit do mind the things of the spirit.—If you be risen with Christ, you will seek the things that are above.” You will never think you have already attained, either are already perfect; but forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, you will press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Once more, From whence do you derive your comfort and joy; from the wells of salvation, that issue forth from beneath the throne of God and the Lamb, or from

the polluted streams that spring out of this footstool upon which we tread?

By this unerring touchstone of God's word let us examine and prove ourselves; and if the Spirit bears witness with our spirits, that these lineaments of the new creature, though too much blended and marred with the features of the old man, are nevertheless legible on the fleshy tables of our hearts, let us give glory to God, who hath thus far formed us for himself, and trust, that he who hath begun a good work in us will carry it on till it be perfected in the heavenly glory. And let the many blemishes we must unavoidably discover, while they humble us in the presence of a holy God, urge us forward, at the same time, to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy for the pardon of past offences, and find grace to help us in every future time of need.

HAVING thus endeavoured to illustrate, and to improve, for self-examination, the distinguishing character of the godly man, as it lies before us in this passage, let us now attend, for our direction, to his leading requests.

1st. He prays for strengthening and upholding grace, "Let thine hand help me."

Dependance upon the Creator belongs to the essence of every creature. None of them subsist by themselves, neither do they possess any thing that they can claim as their property. The highest seraph that ministers before the throne, must adopt the language of the apostle Paul, and say as he did, "By the grace of God, I am what I am." We read of "angels who kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, being reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day." Adam created after the image of God, and furnished with every advantage suited to his rank, seduced by an apostate spirit, forfeited at once both his in-

nocence and happiness, in consequence whereof all his posterity come into the world involved in the forfeiture he incurred, equally destitute of righteousness and strength, according to that saying of the apostle Paul, (Romans v. 6.) “When we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” And though this weakness is in part removed by the renewing influences of the Spirit of God, yet there will always be need for that caution, “Be not high minded, but fear.” Who can say, “My mountain standeth strong, I shall never be moved?” The most eminent saints have not only failed, but failed in those very graces for which they were most eminent, and that too by means of temptations far inferior to others which they were enabled to resist. The faith of Abraham, the patience of Job, the meekness of Moses, and the courage of Peter, were all found unequal to the conflict, when left alone in the hour of trial. These examples are recorded for our admonition; and on each of them we may read the solemn warning, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” Remember who it was that said, “Without me ye can do nothing. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me.” Blessed be God for the assurance we have that help is laid for us upon one that is mighty; upon him let us lean in our journey through the wilderness; to his hand let us look for the help we need, and he will make his grace sufficient for us. Animated by this hope, the same Apostle who said in one place, “I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;” in another place, setting his foot upon the neck of his enemies, utters the shout of victory, in those triumphant words, “I can do all things through Christ which

strengtheneth me." Let us go and do likewise. To the prayer for upholding grace, David adds,

2dly, A desire for quickening grace; for this I take to be the true import of the request, "Let my soul live." Sometimes, indeed, we find him praying for the life of the body, as when he says, "O spare me that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more:" But here the expression is too strong to be limited to a sense comparatively so low.

Life, or conscious exercise, though a valuable gift in itself, is a gift we possess in common with the worst of our own kind, and with the meanest and most noxious of the inferior creatures. Nay, devils partake of it in a higher degree than man. Besides, the life of man, since the apostacy, is become short and precarious; and though it holds true in general, that "skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life;" yet the bitterness of affliction hath caused many to grow weary of it, insomuch that their souls have chosen strangling and death rather than life. But in all these respects, the life of the soul is entirely the reverse. It is not a privilege common to all, but the gift of special distinguishing love. It was purchased for condemning sinners by the blood of Christ; and is produced in dead sinners by his renewing Spirit. So far is it from being short and precarious, that its duration is eternal. It is a "life hid with Christ in God; and because he lives, all who believe in him shall live also." The longer it is enjoyed also, the more it is esteemed. Who was ever heard to say of spiritual life, "I loath it—I would not live always?" Nay, it is the life of the soul alone that gives a relish to the life of the body, and enables the believer, under the heaviest pressure of affliction, either to possess it with thankfulness, or to resign it with joy.

This was the life for which David prayed; a confirmed sense of pardoning mercy, larger measures of sanctifying grace, communion with his God in a present world, and the full and everlasting enjoyment of him in heaven. The life for which he prays, is no other than the salvation for which he longed. He had tasted of its sweetness, and he thirsted for more. "Let my soul live," saith he; to which he subjoins, "and it shall praise thee." From which words we learn, for our farther direction,

3dly, The ultimate end for which David was so earnest in his requests for help and life, and the improvement he proposed to make of both. They were no doubt blessings that would greatly contribute to his own honour and comfort; but every private and personal interest was in him subordinated to the glory of God. He prayed for upholding and quickening grace, that he might be better qualified for the service of his God, to whom he had devoted himself and his all. Thus he prays, (Psal. li.) "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me by thy free Spirit; then will I teach transgressors thy way, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." And the principal reason for which he was desirous to obtain divine consolation, appears from the use he intended to make of it, (verse 32. of this Psalm) "I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart."

I shall therefore make this my concluding exhortation to you.—By your solemn profession at the table of the Lord, you have publicly acknowledged that you are not your own, but bought with a price; in consequence whereof, you are strictly obliged to live not unto yourselves, but to him that bought you; to glorify your Re-

deemer, both with your bodies and spirits, which are his. He says concerning you, “This people have I formed for myself, to show forth my praise.” He calls the world to take knowledge of you, as the persons by whom he expects to be honoured. “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love. Adding to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity :”—abounding in all those fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God; shining as lights in the midst of a perverse and a crooked generation; holding forth the word of life. After this manner improve the help and life you have received, in your attendance upon this precious means of grace. “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” And “let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” *Amen.*

SERMON LVIII.

Preached at the Celebration of the Lord's Supper:

JOHN xvi. 26, 27.

At that day ye shall ask in my name : And I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you ; for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

THESE words spake Jesus, to support the drooping spirits of his disciples. We are told, in the 6th verse, “ that sorrow had filled their hearts.” Although they did not fully understand the intimations he had given them of his approaching sufferings and death, although their warm affection for him made them slow to believe an event so contrary to their expectations and desires ; yet the manner in which he had been speaking to them for some time past, and the unusual tenderness which had of late appeared in his discourses to them, left them no room to doubt, that some sore and heavy trial was at hand. Jesus perceiving their grief, begins to tell them more plainly of his departure from them ; but at the same time gives them such good reasons for it, as could not fail to quiet their minds, and to convince them that his leaving them, instead of being a disaster, was every way necessary for their best interests and happiness. “ It is expedient for you,” says he, in the 7th verse, “ that I go away ; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send him

unto you." As if he had said "The work given me to do is not yet finished : I must yet suffer more before I can reign ; but after my exaltation, to which my death is a previous and necessary step, I will send forth the Comforter, who shall fully supply my place, and make up to you for my bodily absence. What though you shall no more hear instruction from these lips, you shall have a teacher within you, even the Spirit of truth, who shall guide you into all truth. Whilst I am yet with you, you have indeed ready access to me, for counsel and direction, in every case of hazard and perplexity ; and perhaps you fear that when I am taken from you, you shall want a friend to apply to ; but know and rejoice, that I go to my Father who is greater than I, to him you shall have free access for my sake ; and whatever ye shall ask in my name, he shall give it unto you. If I have befriended you so much in my present humble condition, what may you not expect from me, when I am exalted at my Father's right hand."

It is this last ground of comfort which our Saviour enlarges upon in the verses now under consideration ; and the design of them is, to confirm his disciples in the belief of this, that whatever suitable prayer they shall offer up to the Father in his name, they may assuredly expect a gracious answer. The argument he uses for this purpose is very conclusive, and is no where else in Scripture, that I know of, expressed with the same degree of energy and force. "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you." That is, My Father is so fully satisfied with my undertaking for the redemption of the world, and my sufferings and obedience are so meritorious and acceptable in his sight, that even though I were to conceal from you that I am to be your constant intercessor and

advocate in heaven, all of you who love me and believe in me, have abundant reason to expect a favourable hearing from the Father himself: “for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.” And if the Father is already so much disposed to hear our prayers, how great must *their* encouragement be, and how strong *their* consolation, who know besides that their Redeemer liveth to enforce their requests; that he maketh intercession for them, according to the will of God; that his mediation must be always effectual; and that him the Father heareth always. These are joyful tidings indeed, and must make a strong impression on every one whose conscience testifies that he loves the Redeemer, and believes that he came out from God. The Father is fully reconciled to him, the Son constantly prays for him at the throne of heaven; and what may he not then expect from the fulness of him who filleth all in all? But that we may have a more complete view of the comfort which this text presents to us, I shall separately consider,

I. The love of the Father.

II. The intercession of the Son.

III. The security which believers derive from them both, as inseparably united together.

I. then, Let us take a view of the love of God separately from the intercession of our blessed Redeemer. And, for our better conceiving of this, let us consider that remarkable declaration which we have, (John iii. 16, 17.) “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life; for God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.” It was the Father who laid the plan of our redemption. It was he

who sent his Son into the world, not in anger, but in love, that his poor lost creatures might be recovered and saved from that dreadful gulf of misery into which they had plunged themselves. Many look upon the Father as an austere and rigid Being, who has no compassion, who delights in punishing, and even suffers a sort of violence in admitting Christ to be surety for sinners. But it appears from the fore-cited passage, that this is by no means the light in which the Scriptures represent him to us. No; goodness and mercy are the attributes in which he glories. "God is love," saith the Apostle. He is not only represented as accepting the offer when made by the Redeemer, but as being the first mover and spring. How does he rejoice that he has found out a ransom! what special delight does he express towards the Son, when employed in this favoured undertaking! "This," says he, by an audible voice, "is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He sent forth his angels from heaven to proclaim the news of good will to men, to minister to the tempted Saviour, to strengthen him under his agony in the garden, and at last to conduct him in triumph to his own right hand. All these are unquestionable proofs of the Father's love. And if God so loved mankind whilst they were enemies, how much more must he love them when they become friends, when they comply with the terms which he has graciously established for their recovery, by loving and believing in him whom he hath sent? With what delight and complacency must he look upon them? He views us now as ransomed by the blood of his own equal. He looks upon us in the face of his Anointed; and whilst he does so, how warm and affectionate must his regard be! And O what comfort arises to us from this! If our hearts do not condemn us, what confidence must we have

towards such a God! When the sight of our distress, worthless and wicked as we were, moved him to find a Redeemer, will he now reject us when we cry to him, and plead the merit of his own gift? No: "He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up to the death for us all, will certainly with him likewise freely give us all things." Thus the love of God, considered singly by itself, gives us the greatest ground of expectation from him, even though the intercession of Christ were less certainly revealed to us than it is. Let us now, in the

II. place, Take under our consideration the intercession of Christ, than which there is nothing more clearly held forth to us in sacred Scripture. He himself says to his disciples, in the 16th verse of the 14th chapter of this gospel, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter." This is a special part of his office, as our great High Priest, to intercede for his people; and his saving ability is particularly concluded from this, "that he ever liveth to make intercession for us." Heb. vii. 25. Indeed, we have both an example and proof of his intercession in the chapter following, which is wholly employed in prayers for his people. Let us now make the supposition that the Father's love was more doubtful; yea, that there were even some ground to suspect that his affection was quite alienated from the children of men, yet, unless we were to suppose that he had likewise thrown aside all regard to his only begotten Son, we have still ground enough to conclude, that for his sake he will bestow whatever he asks upon those who love him and believe on him. When he presents that body in which he suffered so much—when he pleads the merit and sufficiency of that sacrifice which he offered up—when he urges the memory of the shame, the pain, and the cursed death he underwent to satisfy the

justice of God, and to magnify his law, how prevalent must his suit be! Can the Father turn a deaf ear to his beloved Son, whilst he enforces his plea with such powerful reasonings? Can he behold the prints of that bloody punishment which himself inflicted upon him, and be insensible of their merit?—Now that the most rigorous demands of stern justice are answered, will not mercy be awakened at the entreaty of such a suitor? It were absurd to think so. No; the Father's love to our Redeemer, nay, impartial justice itself, secures the success of the Saviour's intercession, though God were more averse to a reconciliation than the most gloomy self-tormenting mind can conceive.

We have a famous story recorded of two brothers at Athens, which, as it serves to illustrate what I have been saying, I shall briefly relate it to you.—One of them, for some high misdemeanor, was condemned to lose his life, and was going to be led to execution, when his brother, who had lost his hand in the defence of his country, and had been a great mean of gaining a victory which was of the last importance to the state, came suddenly into the court; and without saying a word, but barely holding up his mutilated arm, so prevailed with the judges by this remembrance of what he had formerly done, that they instantly discharged the delinquent brother, though he had forfeited his life. Thus far does the intercession of man prevail with men; and shall not the constant presentation of the Lamb that was slain, for so our Saviour's appearance in heaven is described in the book of Revelation, shall not this be as operative and powerful with the loving Father? The Redeemer thus pleads, “Behold me, O my Father, behold me in a form thus different from that in which I originally was! Behold me now dwelling in human flesh, which I have as-

sumed; and how it was treated for the atonement of thy justice, and the salvation of these my people; and now, let not all my sufferings be in vain, but for my sake receive them into thy favour, and bestow upon them those blessings which have cost me so much." Can any consider the force of this intercession, and yet doubt of its success? Let us, in the

III. place, Join both these together, viz. The assured love of the Father; and—'The constant prevailing intercession of the Son. And O how great is the amount! Either of them singly give us good ground to hope; but when the two are united, how certain, how infallible is our assurance? When the advocate's plea is just and fairly urged, when the Judge is sufficiently qualified, and perfectly well disposed, how safe is the client, how secure of success! If God himself loves you, and the Redeemer never leaves importuning him for you, how is it possible that your prayers should be rejected, or any of your interests miscarry? It is needless to insist any longer in the proof of this; the conclusion is so strong and evident, that you must all of you have made it before I could speak it. I shall therefore suggest to you, in a few particulars, the natural use and improvement of this comfortable subject.

AND now, my dear brethren, upon the review of all that has been said, is not this the secret language of your hearts:—These indeed are blessed news, but what interest have I in them? Does the comfort of them belong to me in particular or not? This is as it should be. In so far you are on the road to the best and most necessary improvement that I can suggest to you. The Scriptures will inform you, that this is the children's bread, in which the dogs can pretend no share. You see it is not a common privilege. It is peculiar to those who love

the Redeemer, "and believe that he is come out from God." This is the test.

Here then is the great and important question, which, in the name of the living God, the Searcher of hearts, I put to every soul who now hears me. Is it your character, or is it not? I do not ask you if you believe the existence of a God, or even the truth of the Christian religion. This is a faith which may go down with you to hell, where the devils themselves believe and tremble.

Neither do I ask you, if you have felt some passing motions of love to Christ, some faint desires after an interest in him. There is a desire of the slothful, says Solomon, that kills him, while it only serves to increase his present uneasiness, and his after punishment. But do you really know Christ, and love him in sincerity? Do you cordially approve of the methods of his saving grace? Do you know what it is to lay down your guilty souls, as under the effusion of his blood, and the covert of his righteousness? Do you know what it is to strip yourselves of pride and self-confidence in his sight, that your nakedness may be clothed with his most perfect righteousness? Do you know what it is to bow to his sceptre, as his obedient subjects; to take the law of your direction from his mouth, and to rejoice that you have such a governor or instructor? And do you feel the necessity of a constant application to him as your great Head, on whose influences you live, and by whose Spirit you must be perpetually aided to all the purposes of a divine life? Can you say to him, as Peter did, "Thou, Lord, who knowest all things, knowest that I love thee?" Does this faith and love govern your practice, and appear in the fruits of holy and virtuous conversation? Have you, by these, been kept only from the grosser habits of falsehood, drunkenness, swearing,

uncleanness, and other rank sins? but is the very inclination to them mortified, and can you say that it is your principal aim and study to maintain consciences void of offence both towards God and man? Do you know what it is to pray in the name of Christ; not barely to pronounce the words, as many do a spell, as if God were to be charmed by a sound; but with a humble sense of your own unworthiness, a firm persuasion of his infinite merit, and a hopeful expectation of being graciously heard for his sake?

These are the marks by which each of you may be known to himself.

And now that I have held up the mirror, I suppose I may warrantably class this whole audience into three different sorts of people.

1st. Those who are yet doubtful of their state, and know not what judgment to pass.

2d. Those who are sensible that the marks that I have given do not at all agree to them. And,

3d. Those with whose spirits the Holy Spirit doth witness, that in truth they love the Redeemer, and believe that he came out from God. And this directs me to a threefold address.

1st. As for you who are yet uncertain about your state, who have not accustomed yourselves to this strict reckoning, and therefore know not what judgment to form of yourselves, What have you been doing? How can you answer this neglect? Ah! shame upon you, to delay an inquiry upon which all the comfort and safety of your souls does depend. How inexcusable is this? If the Scriptures had told us that it was only some few that should miss salvation; yea, if it had been said, that it was only one of ten thousand that was in danger of hell-fire, yet methinks the hazard is so dreadful, that

each of us should be crying out, "Lord, is it I?" But when the Spirit of God tells us, and the common course of the world must convince us, that comparatively there are few, very few, that shall be saved! O how solicitous should every one of us be to know whether we be of that happy number! and how utterly inexcusable are they who neglect it. Well then, let the time past suffice. Speedily set about the most serious examination. Never be at rest till you have come to a just sentence on your case. The discovery will repay all the time and pains you can bestow upon it.

2dly. As for you who are past doubting in this matter, whose full-blown sins testify to your foreheads, that you cannot lay the most distant claim to the character in the text; who neither love the Redeemer, nor believe to any saving purpose that he came out from God, how deplorable is your present case! What! cannot self-love conceal your condition from you? Has it no covering to throw over you, no lurking-place to hide you in? O then bethink you, how open you must be to that God, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, penetrating into the innermost foldings of the most deceitful heart, and marking him for a hypocrite who calls, yea thinks himself just? How does this discovery affect your souls? Canst thou dwell with devouring flames? Canst thou lie down in everlasting burnings? Canst thou bear the heavy hand of Omnipotence upon thee without shrinking? or, if thou canst not, say, Hast thou the most distant hope that possibly thou mayest be saved, notwithstanding thy unbelief and wickedness? The issue of this matter is very short, and requires no great degree of penetration to perceive. If the gospel be not true, thou canst have no ground for any hope at all. And if it be true, thou art utterly cut off from all the hope of it, so long as thou

continuest in thy present state. The Saviour, the almighty Saviour himself, cannot save thee.—He cannot deny himself.—He cannot overturn the whole tenor of the gospel, and make himself the minister of sin.

And are thy unavailing hopes cut off. What course wilt thou then betake thyself to next? Even while I speak, thou art on the brink of destruction, the wrath of God abideth on thee. Behold a black storm of vengeance is gathering around thee, and thou art excluded from the only ark in which thou canst escape. And what excludes thee? Hear, and blush, O sinner, even thine own obstinate folly. Nothing else can; all the devils in hell cannot shut thee out unless thou wilt; and from heaven thou canst meet with no hindrance, where all is love and goodness; so that, if thou dost perish, it must be by thine own merciless hands. And wilt thou be thine own murderer? Wilt thou destroy an immortal soul? Desperate madness! O stop in time, and yet repent and believe, and all that is past shall be forgiven thee. This is the voice of the gospel. These are the tidings which I am warranted to deliver. The much injured Saviour himself shall pray for thee—and he has been praying for thee. For had he not, from year to year, procured saving mercy by his intercession, thou hadst been long ere now cut down as a cumberer of the ground. O then, let this melt down thy heart to an ingenuous sorrow for what is past, and sincere resolutions of amendment for the future. Throw thyself at the feet of this compassionate Saviour; commit thy cause to this prevailing High-Priest. None ever perished that did so. Neither shalt thou, unless almighty power be weakened, or infinite compassions exhausted. Let this be the day of thy return. Speedily break covenant with hell and death, that thou mayest be enrolled among those whom the Father

himself loves, and for whom the Son does in a peculiar manner constantly pray.

3dly. As for you who sincerely love the Redeemer, and believe that he is come out from God, to you belongs all the comfort of these gracious words: Whatever you ask in the name of Jesus shall be freely given you; for the Father himself loveth you, and his blessed Son constantly prays for you. Whatever carnal men may think of this, yet surely it is a privilege of which I hope you know both the value and use. To be allowed access to God at any rate, is a prodigious favour; but to come before him hopefully, with good assurance of being accepted, this is a signal blessing, which is peculiar to yourselves. Lift up thy head, then, O sincere believer. Does thy conscience bear testimony that thou lovest Jesus, and believest that he is the sent of God? Apply then these gracious words to thyself. The Father himself loveth thee, and makes thee welcome to use the prevailing name of his once suffering but now exalted Son. In all thy difficulties come freely to him. "Be careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make thy requests known to God." The Redeemer, too, enforces thy requests, and is more mindful of thee than thou canst be of thyself. He sympathises with thee in all thy infirmities and distresses; and when thou canst not utter thy desires, yet he understands the groanings of his own Spirit within thee. He forms thy petitions, and urges them with all their force; yea, thy very need has a language which he can interpret. He foresees the trials that are coming upon thee, when thou dost not. Thus, whilst Peter was glorying in his strength, his Saviour, knowing his weakness, and the malice of Satan, was praying for him that his faith might not fail. The like provident tenderness will he show to thee.

Even now, O believers, he is pleading on your behalf, whilst the Father listens with delight and approbation. He kindly accepts of this testimony of your love, in keeping up the memory of his bitter passion; and no doubt all your well qualified prayers have been this day powerfully enforced by your faithful High-Priest.

What shall I say more to you? Praise and thanksgiving is your duty at this time. Let your souls, and all that is within you, be stirred up to bless your heavenly Father, whose love was the fountain and spring of your happiness, and is still the foundation of your truest comfort.

Let your souls, and all that is within you, be stirred up to bless your gracious Redeemer, who hath ransomed you by his blood, and who, amid the exaltation of heaven, the splendour of his Father's right hand, still kindly remembers his humble followers, whose ears are ever open to their prayers, whose mouth is ever ready to plead their cause, and, as if it were not love enough to die for them, who also lives and reigns for them, yea, and even glories in being made head over all things to the church. Alas! our praises are so feeble and low, that we may blush and be ashamed to offer them.

But do you not long for heaven, that with a more elevated song than this dull state can admit, you may join in praising this object of your love? Continue yet a little longer—have patience for awhile, give some farther testimonies of your faith here, and he who intercedes for you will receive you to himself; and that you may not doubt of this, read and ponder these gracious verses with which I conclude, (John xvii. 24.) “Father, I will, that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold the glory which

thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, one God, be glory and honour, dominion and power, for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON LIX.

HEBREWS xii. 28, 29.

Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.

THE gospel of our salvation, which contains the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ, is expressly styled the doctrine which is according to godliness. It manifests the grace of God to sinners of mankind; but all who receive that grace are thereby taught effectually to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, in this present world. It abounds with great and precious promises; but all these promises have a practical tendency, that by the belief and improvement of them, we may be made partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the pollution that is in the world through lust. Hence that exhortation, (2 Cor. vii. 1.) “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” If we look through the whole of divine revelation, we shall find in every part, privilege and duty inseparably

connected, and the latter uniformly inferred from the former. This connexion is clearly established in the passage I have read to you, which contains,

I. The distinguishing privilege of believers in Christ. “We,” saith the Apostle, in the name of all true Christians, “receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved.”

II. An exhortation to duty, founded upon this privilege, and the motives with which it is enforced: “Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.”

BOTH these subjects are so extensive, that each of them might furnish materials for many discourses. All I can at present propose is, to give some assistance to your minds when you meditate upon them in private, by weighing the import of the words in which they are expressed; every one of which appears to be strongly emphatical, and full of the most instructive and comfortable meaning.

I begin with the privilege of believers in Christ Jesus, expressed in these words, “We receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved.”—Where you will observe,

1st, The designation that is given to their portion. It is styled a kingdom, which, among earthly possessions is universally admitted to hold the first rank; but what is the highest dignity, and the greatest affluence that this earth can afford, when compared with the kingdom whereof my text speaks? Would you know the extent of it? you may learn it from (1 Cor. iii. 21, &c.) “All things are yours.” And it must be so, for God himself is the portion of his saint; for as many as receive Christ, “to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name;—and if sons, then are they also heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ

Jesus." Accordingly they are said, by the apostle Peter, "to be begotten again to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Which last expression agrees with the description here given by the Apostle, where he calls it a kingdom that cannot be moved; and the stability of it is explained by Peter, in the passage I just now alluded to, where he not only informs us, that this inheritance is reserved in heaven, beyond the reach of every adverse power; but likewise, that all who are begotten again to the hope of it, "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

You will further observe, that believers are said to receive this kingdom. They have no natural right to it; on the contrary, by the fatal apostacy, they are children of wrath and heirs of destruction. They have no price to give for it; for they are not only wretched and miserable, but poor, and blind, and naked. It is a gift altogether free and unmerited on their part. "It is your Father's good pleasure," said Christ to his disciples, "to give you the kingdom;" and eternal life is expressly said to be "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Once more, you will observe, that this inheritance is not altogether future. The Apostle speaks of it as a present possession. He doth not say, We looking for a kingdom that cannot be moved; but, we receiving it in the mean time. This is perfectly agreeable to what he had said, (ver. 22.) "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the

mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Believers have not only a title to the glory that shall afterwards be revealed, but they possess the earnest and first fruits of it in the mean time. Heaven is already begun in their hearts; the kingdom of God is within them, that kingdom which "consisteth not in meats and drinks, but in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.—He who loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood, hath also made them kings and priests unto God.—By beholding his glory with the eye of faith, they are "changed into the same image, from glory to glory," while they sojourn here below, as we read 2 Cor. iii. 18. This resemblance, at present indeed imperfect, shall continually advance, through the influences of the divine Spirit, till, being released from the prison of the body, they shall no more see darkly as through a glass, but face to face; and by seeing him as he is, shall be fully transformed into his image, which will render them completely happy, as it is written, (1 John iii. 2.) "Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Thus have I opened the import of the terms by which the Apostle describes the dignity and happiness of believers in Christ Jesus. By their new birth and in consequence of their union with the Lord Jesus Christ, they are constituted heirs of a kingdom, which it is their Father's good pleasure to bestow upon them by free gift; this kingdom cannot be moved; it was prepared for them before the foundation of the world; it is reserved for them in heaven, and they are kept for it through faith by the power of God: and though the full posses-

sion of it, in all its glory, awaits them in a future state, yet they have their maintenance and provision out of it in the mean time; the new nature they have got is not only the pledge, but the earnest of the inheritance, being of the same kind with that glory which is afterwards to be revealed; they at present receive eternal life, a life that cannot die, but, like the morning light, shall continue to shine with increasing brightness, till in heaven it shall arrive at the perfect day.

Such is the present dignity and happiness of all true believers in Christ Jesus; in this sense the weakest, as well as the strong, receive a kingdom which cannot be moved.

II. LET us consider the exhortation to duty, founded upon this privilege, "Let us have grace."

1st. We are called upon to serve God. Believers, though kings, are still the subjects of the King of kings; and the honour conferred upon them, instead of relaxing their obligation to duty, rather binds them to serve him with greater zeal and activity. Their very royalty consists in their release from the enemies of God, which formerly enslaved and led them captive at their pleasure. Hence that exhortation of the Apostle, "Let not sin reign in your mortal bodies." They are styled, in the book of the Revelation, "Kings and priests to God, even the Father:" and dominion is given them, not in respect of God, to render them independent on him, but in respect of sin, Satan, the world, and death, over all which they are made conquerors through him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his own blood. They are indeed a chosen generation, and a royal priesthood; but for what end? It is, that by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, "they may shew forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvelous light."

2dly. We are reminded of the qualification that is requisite for serving God acceptably. We cannot do this by any strength that is inherent in us. "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves." We are indeed exhorted to work out our own salvation; but at the same time we are told, "that it is God who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The Apostle's words are chosen with the most significant propriety. He doth not say, Let us take strength to ourselves; or, let us purchase it from another; but, let us have it; *i. e.* Let us ask it of him who giveth liberally—Let us possess it, by receiving the gift that is offered; or, having received it, let us hold it fast, as the word is rendered in the margin, and improve it to the purposes for which it was bestowed.

3dly. We are directed to the manner of serving God, so as to be accepted of him, viz. "with reverence and godly fear:" *i. e.* with a deep sense of his infinite greatness, and of our own meanness and unworthiness. We are indeed exhorted and encouraged to come boldly to a throne of grace; but it must be such a boldness only as becometh those who stand in need both of mercy and grace; of mercy to pardon what hath been amiss, and of grace to help them in every time of need. "There is forgiveness with thee," said the Psalmist, "that thou mayest be feared." And indeed mercy is dispensed in such a way, as renders God no less awful than he is amiable to the pardoned sinner. The sacrifice of Christ, while it manifests the love of God in giving his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, affords, at the same time, the strongest proof and demonstration of his holiness and justice. The new and living way of access to God is consecrated for us through the veil of Christ's flesh. The blood that cleanseth from all sin, by which we have

boldness to enter into the holiest, is the blood of Emanuel, the Word made flesh, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that is made. A proper attention to this, will shew both the meaning and propriety of the Apostle's direction to serve God with reverence and godly fear; not the tormenting fear which cherisheth that enmity against God, whereby the carnal mind is characterised; but that filial reverence which flows from a supreme love to God, as a reconciled father, and desire to please him, which consists in a holy jealousy of ourselves, an abhorrence of every thing that is offensive to God, and produceth a carefulness to avoid every temptation to sin, and to shun not only the forbidden, but even the doubtful ground, according to that just description which is given of it, (Prov. viii. 12.) "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil." And the genuine effects of this fear are fully expressed in those advices of the Wise Man, which are recorded, (chap. iv. at the close) "Keep thy heart with all diligence—Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left; remove thy feet from evil." Such is the reverence and godly fear with which we are directed to serve the Lord.

LET us now briefly consider the arguments with which the exhortation is enforced; and these are two—The one respecting the matter of duty in general—And the other, the manner in which the service that is due to God ought to be performed.

1st. We are exhorted to serve God, in testimony of our gratitude for the inestimable benefits his grace hath conferred upon us. This argument is plainly addressed to believers in Christ, who have received that kingdom

which cannot be moved. The Apostle doth not say, Let us serve God that we may obtain a kingdom; but, having received it as the free gift of God, through faith in his Son, who purchased it with his blood, let us express our thankfulness, by devoting ourselves, and all that we have, or can do, to his service. This is the plain and obvious meaning of the Apostle's argument; and in order to make this passage of Scripture speak the language of that scheme of religion which is too current in the world, the words of it would need to be transposed and varied in some such manner as this:

Prompted by self-love, and the tormenting fear of future punishment, let us resolve in our minds, for we neither need nor expect supernatural grace, that henceforth we will serve God, as well as the world and the flesh will permit, that so we may escape damnation, and procure a title to, or at least the probable chance of a kingdom, which, after all, may not only be moved, but so agitated and shaken, that without a vigorous exertion of the powers we possess, we ourselves may be tossed out of it, and fall into perdition.—Thus ridiculous are the best efforts of human wisdom, to corrupt the plain meaning of Scripture language, and to accommodate the constitution of gospel grace to that pride and self-idolatry, which, ever since the apostacy, reign in the heart of every natural man.

Whereas the gospel of Christ binds us to duty by the cords of love; and while it presseth holy diligence and activity in the service of God, by the most persuasive arguments, it animates us, at the same time, with the most comfortable assurance that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. Help is laid for us upon one who is mighty, even that good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep, who gathers the lambs in his bosom,

and gently leads those that are with young. Therefore they shall never perish, because none are able to pluck them out of his hand. He gives unto them eternal life, and they enter upon the possession of it at their new birth, when, by believing on his name, the power, or rather the privilege is given them, to become the sons of God. His grace is sufficient for them at all times, and in every situation. He is gone to his Father's house to prepare a place for them; and he will come again and receive them to himself, that where he is, there they may be also, to behold that glory which his Father hath given him. "Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

2d. The argument, which respects the manner of our service, is contained in these words, "For our God is a consuming fire." This, at first sight, does not seem to accord with the other argument, which is addressed to the ingenuity and gratitude of a renewed heart; but appears rather adapted to the spirit of bondage, than to that spirit of adoption which believers in Christ receive, whereby they are disposed and enabled to call God Father. But I shall direct you to two passages of Scripture, which, I apprehend, will remove this difficulty, and lead us to the true meaning and intent of the Apostle's argument.

One is, Isaiah xxxi. 9. where it is said, as a ground of fear to the enemies of Zion, and consequently as a ground of encouragement to her children, that "the Lord hath his fire in Zion, and his furnace in Jerusalem."

The other is Mal. iii. 2. where the Messenger of the Covenant and King of Zion is compared to a refiner's fire, and fuller's soap. "He shall sit as a refiner and

purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness." In this sense, he is a consuming fire to the godly; he refines them by consuming their dross. This view of God indeed is terrible to the wicked, who are all dross; but it hath another aspect to the godly, who are made partakers of the divine nature. The fire that burns up the enemies of God altogether, shall only consume the dross that still cleaves to them, and from which they will never be wholly separated. till death dissolve their earthly tabernacles. Nevertheless, this is urged, with great propriety, as an argument for serving God with reverence and godly fear; for the means of purifying may be very painful in the mean time, and as it is written, (Psalm xcix. 8.) "Though he forgives their sins, yet he will take vengeance of their inventions." The children of God may be assured of it, that the rod shall not be withheld—their own backslidings shall be made to reprove them; "for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." And therefore they should serve God with reverence, that a moderate furnace may suffice to purge away their dross, and that it may not become necessary that God, for their correction, should wound their hearts in the tenderest part, by taking from them their dearest earthly comforts, or withdrawing the light of his countenance utterly from them. "Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a consuming fire."

SERMON LX.

Preached on a Public Fast-Day, in the time of the American War.

ISAIAH xxii. 12—14.

And in that day did the LORD OF HOSTS call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth; and behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die. And it was revealed in mine ears by the LORD OF HOSTS, Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the LORD GOD OF HOSTS.

THIS passage is introduced with a loud and pressing call to repentance. It describes the contemptuous behaviour of the people to whom the call was addressed; and concludes with an alarming denunciation of wrath against those perverse and obstinate transgressors.

Each of these particulars I shall briefly illustrate, and then point out our immediate concern in the subject, and the practical improvement we all ought to make of it.

THE *first* thing that occurs is the call to repentance, (verse 12.) “In that day did the Lord of Hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth.”

The day here referred to was a season of abounding iniquity, as we learn from the first chapter of this book of prophecy, which begins with a heavy charge against

the nation of the Jews, published with awful solemnity by God himself, in the following words: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken! I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. Ah, sinful nation! a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evil doers, children that are corrupters. They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger, they have gone away backward." Accordingly the prophet, in bespeaking their attention to the message he was about to deliver, addressed them, in terms of severe reproach, (verse 10.) "Hear the words of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah." And the lamentation he utters, (verse 21.) shows with what justice and propriety those titles of ignominy were applied to them. "How is the faithful city become an harlot! It was full of judgment, righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers. Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water. Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards."

Their boldness and impudence in sinning are particularly taken notice of, as high aggravations of their guilt, (chap. iii. verses 8, 9.) "The show of their countenance doth witness against them, and they declare their sin as Sodom; they hide it not. Their tongue and their doings are against the Lord, to provoke the eye of his glory." Neither was this accusation limited to the men in that age; for, (ver. 16.) even the daughters of Zion are represented as "haughty, walking with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they went," under the cumbersome load of tinkling or-

naments, chains and bracelets, and the many other superfluous articles of dress, of which a catalogue is left on record from the 18th verse downward, till, at the 24th verse, the fantastic inventory is closed with that humiliating doom: "It shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell, there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle, a rent; and instead of well set hair, baldness; and burning instead of beauty."

This leads me to mention another circumstance, by which the day referred to in my text is distinguished. It was a day of sore rebuke, as well as of abounding iniquity. "Look away from me," said the prophet, ver. 4. of this chapter, "I will weep bitterly, labour not to comfort me, because of the spoiling of the daughter of my people; for it is a day of trouble, and of treading down, and of perplexity, by the Lord God of Hosts in the valley of vision."

Such was the day in which the Lord God of Hosts did call to weeping and mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth, *i. e.* to the deepest humiliation on account of their sins, to the most unfeigned repentance, and amendment of life. That this is the true import of the call, appears from a similar exhortation, (Joel ii. 12.) where, after the Lord had given commandment to blow the trumpet in Zion, and to sound an alarm in his holy mountain, that all the inhabitants of the land might tremble in the prospect of that day of darkness and gloominess, which was soon to be spread over them; he addresses them in these words: "Turn ye even to me with all your heart, with weeping and with mourning, and rent your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God."

In every age, and in every climate, weeping and mourning are the natural expressions of inward sorrow.

In the eastern countries, and especially among the Jews, when grief rose to a great height, tears of lamentations were usually accompanied with rending their clothes, plucking out their hair, and covering their bodies with sackcloth. And though these outward signs are only the trappings of wo, which are no further acceptable than as they truly express the sorrow and contrition of the heart, yet, in the case before us, they are expressly required of that impudent and hard-hearted people, that as their tongue and their doings had been against the Lord, to provoke the eyes of his glory, so their shame and sorrow might be proclaimed as openly as their sin, and their penitent return to God might be no less apparent than their proud and insolent revolt had been.

Having made these remarks upon the import of the call, and the state of the Jews in the day it was published to them, let me now,

II. Lead forward your attention to the account that is given us of the reception it met with, (ver. 13.) “And behold!” It is introduced, you see, with a note—what shall I call it?—Whether doth it bespeak our admiration or astonishment? The object must surely be wonderful, either for beauty or deformity, to which the great God himself demands our attention with such solemnity.

Say then, my brethren, were you not already acquainted with what follows, would you not expect to see a multitude of humble penitents, prostrate on the ground, and covered with sackcloth, while, with weeping and mourning, they say one to another, in the language of genuine repentance, “Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.” But what do we really see? Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid. Instead of mourning and weeping, be-

hold joy and gladness; instead of baldness and girding with sackcloth, behold every kind of riotous excess, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine.

There is no room to suppose that they had given no attention to the message delivered by the prophet. It would rather appear that they had attended to it with accuracy, nay, studied its meaning, on purpose to counteract it; for a contrast so minutely exact, a scheme of contradiction so completely adjusted, could hardly have been stumbled upon by mere accident. And indeed the latter part of the verse puts this beyond all doubt. "*Let us eat and drink,*" said they, "*for to-morrow we shall die.*"

We are not to imagine that these words were spoken seriously by one of those presumptuous and boasting rebels. The most daring amongst them must have been conscious, that the aspect of the king of terrors, at their most sumptuous entertainments, would leave them no appetite for flesh or wine. They meant it as a scoff, a witty saying, for turning into ridicule the warning they had received, but which they did not believe. The prophet hath been telling us of desolating judgments just at hand, and with the same breath he calls us to weeping, and mourning, and girding with sackcloth. How absurd, how unreasonably cruel is the demand! Will not the evil day come soon enough, though we should not anticipate the sorrows of it, by afflicting ourselves unnecessarily before its arrival? Nay, rather, if life is to be cut short, let us make the most of it while it lasts. If we must die to-morrow, let us eat and drink, and be merry to-day, and crowd into the few scanty hours that remain as much festivity and pleasure as we can.

Surely it is not needful that I should lengthen out

this picture of deformity in all its dimensions. Its most distinguishing features are abundantly obvious; and I am confident, that the few sketches I have given you, will suffice to render the generation it represents, the objects of contempt and abhorrence to all; those very persons not excepted, who, in the portrait drawn for them, may perhaps discover their own true likeness. For it is common enough to condemn with just, though partial severity, the same faults in others which we easily forgive, nay cherish in ourselves. At any rate, I suppose none of us will be surprised to hear the alarming denunciation of wrath against those perverse and obstinate transgressors; which is the

III. Particular contained in my text, (ver. 14.) “It was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts, surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of Hosts.”

We meet with another threatening of the same import, (Ezek. xxiv. 13.) “Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee. I the Lord have spoken it, and it shall come to pass, and I will do it. I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent, saith the Lord God.”

These wicked men had not only resisted the means of conviction, but they had perverted those means and extracted poison from the medicine intended for their cure. They drew iniquity with cords of vanity, and sinned as it were with a cart rope. By their scoffing reply to the call that was given them, in the name of the Lord God of Hosts, they said in effect, with insolent contempt and proud defiance, “Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the

counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it." The prophet therefore proclaims, as on the house top, what God had revealed in his ears, that from that time forward, vengeance should pursue those impious men, till, like their rebellious forefathers, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness, they should be utterly consumed from off the face of the earth.

Thus have I endeavoured briefly to illustrate the several parts of the passage before us.

But what concern have we in these things? and what improvement shall we make of them?

For an answer to these questions, I need only refer you to 1 Corinthians, chap. x. where, after reciting some of those awful judgments which God had inflicted upon his ancient church, the Apostle subjoins those memorable words, (verse 11.) "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

"The Lord is known by the judgments which he executes." God is always the same: with him there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. And therefore, in his past acts of government, as they are explained by his word, we behold a plan of righteous administration; from whence we may learn, with some degree of certainty, what kind of treatment, in similar circumstances, we ourselves have reason to expect.

They must know little of what passes in the world, who do not observe a very striking resemblance between the present state of our own nation and that of the Jews, in the day to which my text refers.

Ingratitude to God, for the great things he hath done in our behalf, and for the distinguishing privileges we have long enjoyed, is too apparent to require any proof. Our deliverance from popery at the Reformation, and the full establishment of our civil and religious liberties

at the Revolution; these marvellous doings of the Lord are either forgotten by many, as a dead man out of mind, or at least remembered with cold indifference; nay, treated with marks of disaffection by some, while the character of those illustrious men, whom God honoured to be the instruments in bringing about those glorious events, have been canvassed with the utmost severity of criticism, and under the specious pretext of candour and impartiality, set forth to public view in the most unfavourable light.

Have not vice and immorality grown up among us to an amazing height? Do not multitudes proclaim their sins as Sodom; and, instead of hiding them, do they not rather glory in their shame, as if they accounted it an honour to excel in one species of wickedness or another? I do not aggravate the charge: every one's observation may convince him of the truth of it. Is there not a visible and growing contempt of the blessed gospel? Are not its ordinances despised by some, and profaned by others; nay, is it not by many deemed a mark of superior genius, to reject the whole of divine revelation as a cunningly devised fable, and to employ all their influence in proselyting others to their opinion?

What small success attends the preaching of the gospel even among those who profess to believe? Into how many sects and parties are they divided? With what zeal do they build up their walls of partition? With what animosity do they contend for their own peculiarities, as points of new and important discovery, though in fact most of them might lay claim to a very ancient date, have been often republished, and as often refuted? Now, union is the strength of the religious, as well as of the civil community; and there is reason to fear that God will suffer that candlestick to be removed from among

us, about which we quarrel and fight with one another, instead of walking by the light it affords, and performing the work which was given us to do.

I shall not waste any part of your time upon the mere triflers of either sex, who literally walk in a vain show, and ought rather to be regarded as the scenery or decorations of the theatre, than as actors sustaining any character upon the stage. Yet even they, light as they may seem, make some addition to the load of national guilt, as we learn from the passage respecting the daughters of Zion, in the third chapter of this prophecy, which I formerly quoted. Enough has been said to prove, that we are a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, and that the call to repentance is proper and seasonable, and belongs to the very day in which our lot is cast.

Indeed our very meeting together in this place is a public acknowledgment of it. For what purpose are we convened by royal authority? Is it not that we may humble ourselves before Almighty God, and send up our prayers and supplications to the divine Majesty, for obtaining pardon of our sins, and for averting those heavy judgments which our manifold provocations have most justly deserved?

Thus far we may be assured, that the call of the Lord of Hosts hath been distinctly and faithfully echoed from the throne. And lest, after all, we should turn a deaf ear to his voice, the Lord of Hosts hath written the same call upon the face of providence, in characters so legible, that they must be worse than blind who do not read and understand them.

The little cloud, like a man's hand, that arose a few years ago on the other side of the Atlantic, hath ever since been increasing both in size and in blackness.

Our envious and deceitful neighbours, who, by secret

artifice, have endeavoured from the beginning to keep the unhappy breach open between Great Britain and her colonies, have at length laid aside the mask, and are now straining every nerve to spread the desolations of war through the whole extent of the British empire.

The sword that was drawn for coercion abroad, now finds employment for self-defence at home; and the measures hitherto pursued have been so ineffectual, that after much expense of blood and treasure, we may say with the Jews in the days of Jeremiah, (chap. xiv. 19.) “We looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble.”

What shall we say to these things? Do they bear no impression of God’s holy and righteous displeasure?—“Will a lion roar in the forest, when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry in his den, if he hath taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? Shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?”

Our own wickedness is made to correct us, and our backslidings reprove us, that we may *know and see what an evil thing it is, and bitter, that we have forsaken the Lord our God.*

This, my brethren, is the primary aim of all God’s corrections. He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; but when transgressors will not learn the malignity of sin by gentler means, then he causes them to feel the evil of it in the bitterness of affliction. Hence it appears, that temporal judgments are acts of mercy as well as of justice, especially when they are of such a nature as to bear the stamp and signature of those

sins which are the cause of them. Till we discern the hand of God in the sufferings that befall us, we shall never have recourse to the true and the only effectual remedy. When public measures are defeated, we shall sometimes blame the contrivance, and at other times the execution; but still we shall look to the creature for help, and place our trust in the arm of flesh.

This was an express article of indictment against the Jews in the preceding context. They used every precaution to put their city into a proper state of defence. They inspected their magazines, they repaired the breaches in their walls, and provided large store of water for a siege. In all this they acted wisely, and did no more than was their duty. But herein lay their fault, (verse 11.) they relied upon the preparations for the safety of Jerusalem, and “*did not look unto the Maker thereof, neither had respect unto him that fashioned it long ago.*”

I have therefore endeavoured to lead your attention to God himself, and to trace up all the penal evils we feel to the several instances of our criminal departure from him, as their true origin and source; and though perhaps I may have erred in the illustration of particulars, yet I cannot help thinking that the general truth will appear with sufficient evidence, that our own backslidings are reproving us, and that we ourselves have made the rod with which we are smitten.

By this time we may all see our concern in this subject, and the improvement we ought to make of it.

It is righteousness alone that exalteth a nation. Repentance towards God, flowing from faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, is the only effectual means for preventing the ruin of a sinful people. Without this we may obtain a temporary respite from punishment; but the clouds will return again after the rain; and all the while we

are filling up the measure of our iniquity, the consumption is advancing, and every day we draw nearer and nearer to dissolution. Whereas, if we accept of the punishment of our iniquity, and put away from us those evil doings which provoke the Lord to jealousy, then may we hope that he will return to us in mercy, and rejoice over us to bless us and to do us good; according to that encouraging promise, (Jer. xviii. 7.) “At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy; if that nation, against which I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.”

It is this which should always give check to any desponding thoughts. We have but ONE to please, ONE whose favour is desirable, and ONE who is most easily pleased; because he hath told us, without ambiguity, what will please him; and at the same time hath declared his readiness to aid our feeble endeavours, by working in us effectually both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Let us then hearken to the call of the Lord God of Hosts. Let us, with weeping and mourning, return to him, from whom, alas! we have deeply revolted, and ask of him, this day, the spirit of repentance, and grace to walk in newness of life, by bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

In this way only can we hope, that he who hath the hearts of all men in his hands, will give judgment to them who sit in judgment, and strength to those who turn the battle from the gate; and cause our eyes once more to see our Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down, none of whose cords shall be broken, neither any of the stakes thereof ever removed. *Amen.*

SERMON LXI.

REVELATION iii. 18.

I counsel thee to buy of ME gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.

BEFORE I enter upon the consideration of this gracious counsel, I conceive it may be of use to give you some account, *First*, of the person who gave the advice; and, *Secondly*, of those to whom it was addressed.

The person who gave the advice was our Lord Jesus Christ; that Wonderful Counsellor, and Prince of Peace, foretold by the prophet Isaiah, of the increase of whose government there shall be no end. Here he styles himself the Amen, the Faithful and true Witness: One whose word may be depended upon, who does not come and go, say and unsay, but who is always in one mind, without any variableness or shadow of turning. He is God's witness to the sons of men; and as he is perfectly acquainted with the Father, so he faithfully reports the Father's mind and will to us. His testimony is infallible; for as he cannot be deceived himself, so neither is he capable of deceiving others. I need scarcely observe to you the vast importance of this part of his character. Indeed without it, our faith, and consequently our hope and comfort, would be mere delusion; but blessed be God, the truth and faithfulness of this divine

witness, doth infinitely remove from us every possible cause or ground of suspicion. Men may utter falsehoods through mistake and ignorance; or even when they know the truth, they may be induced, by selfish views, to conceal or disguise it. But neither of these grounds of distrust are applicable to our Lord. His knowledge is unlimited, and absolutely perfect; and his infinite fulness and self-sufficiency, raise him above all kinds of dissimulation or artifice. And probably this is the reason why he styles himself, (in the close of the 14th verse) the Beginning, or first Cause of the creation of God. He can have no dependance upon the workmanship of his own hands. As their goodness cannot profit him, neither can their malice hurt him; so that he can be under no temptation, either to overawe them with imaginary terrors, or to allure them with vain and flattering promises. Well then, the character of Counsellor is fair and untainted; and, if the advice he gives us is kind and obliging, there is no room to question the sincerity of his good-will. Here, therefore, my brethren, is one great point gained; and as I am afterwards to lay a considerable stress upon it, I beg you may attend to it in the mean time, and consider, as I go along, that the person who spoke in this passage, and in whose name I now speak to you, is the Faithful and True Witness, the independent Creator and Governor of the world.

Let us next inquire who the persons were to whom the advice or counsel was addressed. In general they were members of Christ's visible church, and inhabitants of the ancient city of Laodicea; it appears also from the description given of them, that with respect to their spiritual concerns, they were in a very degenerate and wretched condition. The first thing taken notice of is their lukewarmness and indifference—a temper which

is peculiarly loathsome and offensive to Christ, and therefore he threatens to “*spue* them out of his mouth,” that is, to testify his displeasure against them by some very awful and remarkable judgments. Their state is more fully represented in the verse preceding my text, where the Faithful and True Witness tells them that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked; and which prodigiously aggravated both their guilt and misery—they knew it not—they were insensible of it; though they might have known it, yet they would not. Such was their woful indifference, that they did not examine their spiritual condition, but took it for granted, and boasted of it, that they were rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing. And now judge, my brethren, whether these persons were worthy of any notice or regard, I mean in a way of mercy; for that they merited wrath, I suppose you will readily allow. Behold then, and admire the amazing grace and condescension of our Lord. Though the wickedness of the Laodiceans, aggravated by their pride and loathsome indifference, cried aloud for vengeance, and nothing but vengeance. yet, lo! he vouchsafes to counsel them as a friend!—O how encouraging may this be to those who are burdened with a sense of their guilt and pollution—who see their need of Christ, and pant and long for his great salvation. You say you are unworthy of his aid, and you are right when you say so; but such is his grace, as appears from this epistle, that the greatest unworthiness is no bar in the way of it. He not only counsels, but entreats those Laodiceans, whose condition was as bad as can well be imagined. “Behold,” says he, in the 20th verse, “I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with

me." Here then is sufficient evidence, that there is mercy with Christ for the chief of sinners. This was his very errand, to seek and to save that which was lost. And therefore every soul that feels its misery has no reason to be discouraged, because of its unworthiness; on the contrary, this very temper lays it as it were in the way of his mercy; for though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly.—He resists the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.—Yea, he dwells with those who are of a contrite spirit, and that tremble at his word. The use I intend to make of this is to obviate an objection which frequently proves hurtful to newly converted sinners. They are tempted to think that their case does not admit of any hope; having dark and imperfect views of the grace of the gospel, they put away from themselves the sweetest and most condescending offers of mercy, supposing that they are not addressed to them, but to others whose guilt is less aggravated than theirs: but give me leave to assure you, in the name of the Faithful and True Witness, whose message I now bear, that the counsel I have read to you, and which I am farther to open, is directed to every soul within these walls, the vilest not excepted. Are you wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked—hearken to the advice of your gracious Lord, an advice which he gives to every one of you in particular, as if he called you by your name:

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.”

It is needless to inquire very critically into the precise meaning of these figurative expressions. I reckon

that every necessary blessing, even all the unsearchable riches of Christ, are comprehended in these three articles. It is sufficient to observe, that the supply here offered is exactly suited to the sinner's wants—that it is not scanty and penurious, but full and complete—and that all the parts of it are perfect in their kind. Let us dwell a little upon each of these heads.

I. Then, you will observe, that the supply here offered is exactly suited to the sinner's wants.—As we come into the world we are poor bankrupt creatures. Adam had a vast stock put into his hands; but by his apostacy from God, he lost it for himself and for all his posterity; so that nothing is left that we can call our own, but guilt and misery. The image of God, which was the glory and riches of man in his first creation, is quite effaced; so that, as the Apostle expresses it, “in us, that is, in our flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” Well, then, to supply this woful defect, Christ here tells us that he hath gold to enrich us—even all divine and saving graces. The spirit was given to him without measure, to be communicated to his people. He is able not only to expel that corruption which hath got possession of our natures; but he can give us a new heart stamped with the image of God, and make us partakers of the divine nature. The truth of this is attested by the apostle John, from his own experience, (John i. 16.) where he says, “Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”

Another branch of our misery is NAKEDNESS. We have nothing to cover us either from shame or hurt. We are exposed to the wrath of an holy, just, and omnipotent God, who infinitely hates sin, and hath pledged his faithfulness, that he will not suffer it to pass unpunished. To relieve us in this case of extreme necessity,

Christ hath raiment to clothe us, that the shame of our nakedness may not appear. He can spread his righteousness over us. He can sprinkle us with his atoning blood, so that the destroying angel, the minister of his Father's justice, shall have no power to hurt us: "For there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus—being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Again, we are BLIND creatures, having our understandings darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us.

To remedy this, our great physician hath eye-salve to anoint our eyes that we may see. By his Holy Spirit, he can dispel the thickest darkness, and diffuse heavenly light through the whole soul. "Ye were sometimes darkness," says Paul to the converted Ephesians, "but now are ye light in the Lord." In a word, something is to be found in Christ that exactly suits us in every case we can imagine. He hath bread for the hungry, water for the thirsty, wine for the faint, medicine for the sick; or, as the Apostle beautifully expresseth it, "He is made of God unto his people, wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." 1 Cor. i. 30.

II. It deserves our notice, that the supply here offered is not only such as we need, but likewise full and complete. A poor man may get an alms to keep him from perishing, a naked creature may get a rag to cover his nakedness, and to screen his body from the inclemency of the weather; but our bountiful Lord doth not deal with his people in such a sparing and niggardly manner. He gives them gold to enrich them—not merely to relieve their wants, to answer their pressing necessities—but to raise them above poverty. He advances them to a large and opulent estate. The raiment he clothes

them with is fair and complete, so that the shame of their nakedness can no more be seen. He covers them from head to foot, spreads his whole satisfaction over them, so that no part is left exposed to the sword of justice. They are made righteous by his righteousness imputed to them, and comely by his comeliness put upon them. And,

III. As this supply is suitable and full, so I farther observed to you, that all the parts of it are perfect in their kind. His gold is the most fine gold, gold tried in the fire, not only precious in itself, but thoroughly purged from all dross or alloy. His raiment is white, without spot or blemish; not only a covering, but an ornament to the soul.—His eye-salve has a sovereign and never-failing virtue. Other medicines may strengthen the eye, or recover a weak sight; but this cures blindness itself, and gives such vigour to the eye that is anointed with it, that the person can even look within the veil, and read his name written in the Lamb's book of life. And now let me ask you, What think ye of Christ? Is he not a gracious, as well as a faithful Witness? Are not his offers great, inconceivably great? and is not this counsel most kind and obliging?

But what is his counsel, and how does he direct us to obtain this full and all-sufficient supply? Let us hear his own words:

“I counsel thee,” says he, “to buy it of me.”

I frankly own to you, there is something in this expression which startles one at the first sight; but when we examine it more accurately, the difficulty vanishes. It is evident that the word *buy* cannot be taken in a strict and literal sense, unless we suppose it to have been said by way of ridicule; for the description of those to whom the advice was addressed necessarily implies that they had nothing to give. They were in the greatest extremi-

ty of misery and wretchedness, not only blind and naked, but poor, without money to buy either clothing or medicine. Where then could they find a price that bore any proportion to the blessings here spoken of? I think I could challenge the most sanguine advocate for merit to tell me what these people had to give, unless it was self-conceit, of which indeed it appears they had enough, and to spare; for poor and naked as they were, they boasted of great things, saying they were rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing. Indeed I am of opinion, that this hint may help us to the meaning of the expression; for the very notion of buying, necessarily includes in it that something must be parted with, and as these Laodiceans had nothing to dispose of but their pride, our Saviour's advice might be intended to intimate this much to them, that in order to their receiving these invaluable blessings, it behoved them to forego their self-conceit in the first place, and then to come to him naked and empty as they were, under a deep and humble sense of their poverty and wretchedness, and on their knees to accept those offered mercies, as the free unmerited gifts of his bounty and grace. This accordingly is perfectly agreeable to other passages of Scripture, particularly to that gracious proclamation and call, (Isa. lv. 1.) to which the counsel here offered has a very near resemblance:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." Which last expression, "without price," seems to have been added, on purpose to guard against any wrong sense that might otherwise have been put upon the word *buying*. A person who wants money, may have other things of value to trade with, but here they are called to buy,

not only without money, but without price; that is, in plain language, to buy and pay nothing, which is only another way of expressing the humble and thankful acceptance of a gift. It is even probable that our Saviour chose this rather than any other expression, to signify that their acceptance should not be rash and hasty, but deliberate and well advised; and at the same time to assure them, that upon their acceptance, these invaluable blessings should become as truly and irrevocably theirs, as if they had really bought them, and given a full and adequate price for them.

Thus have I opened the meaning of this counsel or advice—an advice seasonable at all times, and peculiarly adapted to the occasion of our present meeting. The character of those to whom it was originally addressed, would lead me to speak to proud self-justifiers, who, like the luke-warm Laodiceans, imagine themselves to be rich and increased with goods, and to stand in need of nothing. Might I stay accurately to examine your supposed righteousness, I think I could say several things to make you ashamed of them, and to convince you that they are all but filthy rags. But this would require more time than we have to spare. All I can do for you is to pray, and beg that others would pray, that God may pity you, and open your eyes.—I hope there are some now hearing me of a different character, to whom I reckon myself more immediately a debtor, I mean those whose eyes are so far opened, as to see that they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. It is to you, my dear friends, that our Saviour doth this day address the advice in my text:

“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness

do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.”

What have you to object against this advice?—Are not these the very things you need? are they not exactly suited to your state and circumstances?—Would you not think yourselves bound to bless God eternally, for giving you such a rich and full supply? I think I may reasonably take all this for granted.—What discourages you then?—You say you are unworthy. I ask you, Where does Christ speak as if he supposed you to be worthy? Were this a secret known only to yourselves, you might indeed have cause to dread a discovery; but the Lord Jesus knew this before you knew it. Nay, if he had not told you of it, I dare venture to affirm you should never have found it out, I mean in this world, for death and judgment will clear up all mistakes. Why then do you make objections where Christ makes none?—Is his honour dearer to you than to himself?—Does he not know how to dispense his mercy till you have taught him? I charge you to beware of such presumptuous conceits. It is *because* you are poor, and blind, and naked, that he counsels you to come to him for the supplies here offered.

But does he not speak of buying; and what price can I offer him for such inestimable blessings? I have already told you what I take to be the meaning of that expression;—but as this objection is of a very deadly nature, and commonly proves one of the strongest bars in men’s way to Christ, it is necessary to examine it with some more accuracy. And, first, I must ask those who make the objection, Are you really willing to take these blessings for nothing, if you can get them? Do not answer rashly, for I apprehend there is a secret deceit within you, that you are not aware of.—Say, would it

not give you a mighty satisfaction, if you could discover something in yourselves that might entitle you to these blessings, or, at least, that might incline or dispose Christ to bestow them upon you? Would it not give you some courage, if you could shed more penitent tears for sin, if you felt more love for God and the Redeemer, or if you were more exact and blameless in your conduct and behaviour? And are you not secretly displeased with yourselves, that you cannot attain to these things before you apply to Christ for his aid? If this is the case, allow me to put your objection in its proper form. It is not, as you apprehend, I have nothing to give to Christ as a price for his benefits; but I have not enough.—My stock is too small to buy such an inheritance; and till it is better improv'd, it is vain for me to hope that my offer can be accepted. Alas! my brethren, it is plain from this, that pride is at the root of your objection, though it has artfully put on the form of humility; at the bottom, you are pleased with the notion of buying, and are only vexed that you have not enough to give. You secretly dream that, by diligence and good management, you may at length acquire something that may deserve the favourable regards of the Redeemer; and therefore, once for all, I must tell you, that, notwithstanding your mournful complaints of poverty, you are really far poorer than you suppose yourselves to be. You not only want a price in the mean time, but you shall never be able to find a price that bears the smallest proportion to the blessings you need; and Christ, who shed his blood to purchase these benefits, will never sell them below their value. The truth is, he does not intend to dispose of them in that way. Though he bought them at a high rate, he gives them away freely, and gives them only to those who, disclaiming all merit and worthiness in themselves, are

willing to receive them merely as an alms, to which they neither have, nor can have, any title.

Let me therefore entreat you to come to him, poor and naked as you are. It is his own counsel, and, as I told you, he is the true and faithful Witness. You may depend upon his word, and shall never have cause to repent your following his advice. Come, then, O sinners, at his call, and believe it, that he is more willing to give you the blessings here spoken of, than you are or can be to ask them from him. You honour the truth of Christ when you obey his summons; whereas, you directly give him the lie, and call him a false and flattering witness, when, upon any pretence whatever, you keep at a distance from him, and question his readiness to perform what he hath promised. He not only counsels, but invites; he not only invites, but entreats; and to remove every ground of suspicion or jealousy, he adds his oath to his promise, and to both he superadds his seal, and is now ready to hold it out to you in the holy sacrament. Let me therefore, once more, beseech you to hearken to his advice. First come to himself by an humble faith, and then come and receive the New Testament in his blood.

As for you who have already been determined by grace to listen to the advice of this faithful Witness, I this day invite you, in his name, to come anew, and draw water out of the wells of salvation. For you, he hath again covered a table in the wilderness, and instituted this ordinance for your spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. You have formerly tasted that the Lord is gracious, he is now waiting to give you some farther experience of it. Come forward then with thankful hearts, and enlarged desires. Devise liberal things, for he is a liberal Giver. Open your mouths wide, and he will fill them abundantly. *Amen.*

SERMON LXII.

ECCLESIASTES viii. 13.

But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he feareth not before God.

THE promiscuous distribution of good and evil, in the present life, has always tended to weaken the influence of moral and religious motives among mankind. Our minds are so framed, that pleasure or pain, immediately or soon to be experienced, affect them in a much stronger degree, than greater measures of either, removed by distance of future time. There is a prodigious difference between certainty, as the mere object of our understanding, and the strong impression produced by the consideration of those things which are not only certain, but near at hand. The former merely produces assent of the mind; the latter lays hold of the heart, and influences the conduct. Accordingly we find, that all who have aspired to the art of persuasion, in moral or religious discourses, have endeavoured to heighten the influence of distant motives, by placing the objects of them in the strongest light. This may be done either directly, by representing their superior and infinite importance, or implicitly, by lessening our conceptions, and thereby lowering our solicitude, as to the intervening period.

This last is the method adopted by Solomon, in the passage with which the text is connected. In the preceding verse, he had expressed, in the strongest terms, the

full assurance he had that it should finally be well with them that fear God. Many, indeed, in the present time, are the afflictions of the righteous. In the world, they are generally despised, and reviled, and persecuted. And what is the reason of this? Our Lord tells his disciples the reason: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." But what is the hatred, the calumny, or the persecution of the world, to those whose minds are raised above it, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; whose light affliction, which is but for a moment, works out an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory.

Let us now change the view. The sinner may do evil an hundred times, and as often prosper in his schemes of iniquity; yet, in the midst of all this outward success, he is still the object of pity and compassion, rather than of envy. To real happiness his heart is a stranger; he grasps at enjoyment, and embraces vanity; his days fly away as a shadow; they see no good; and he himself is fast hastening to those regions of darkness, where nothing is heard but the voice of fruitless lamentation, and everlasting despair.

This, it must be confessed, is a gloomy subject; but gloomy as it is, we must not forbear to press it on your attention. The same God who commands us to say to the righteous, It shall be well with him, commands us likewise to deliver this awful warning: "It shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God."

But, before I proceed to illustrate the threatening in the text, there is a previous point to be settled, without

which, all that I can say must have very little effect, and that is, who the wicked here spoken of are, who are the persons against whom this threatening is denounced?

Were I, in answer to this inquiry, to begin with describing those gross and flagitious crimes, which the natural conscience of every man abhors, I should only spend your time, and offend your ears to no purpose; for who is there in all the society of mankind, not to say in a Christian assembly, that will dispute the justice of this appellation, as applied to thieves and robbers, oppressors and murderers, blasphemers, false swearers, and open contemners of all laws, human and divine? I may safely presume on your assent, that characters such as these, so obnoxious even to human society, may properly be classed among the wicked, against whom the threatening of the text is denounced. I may even take it for granted, that the greater part of my audience will advance a step farther, and permit me to pass the same censure upon those who are guilty of the more prevailing sins of the present time, such as profane swearing, uncleanness, drunkenness, breach of the Lord's day, and habitual neglect of divine institutions. Thus far, I suppose, we are generally agreed. But if we consult the Scriptures, the only infallible rule of judging, we shall find that the term *wicked* is of a still more extensive signification, and comprehends a great many characters besides those already named. Of this I cannot give you a more convincing proof, than by referring you to that plain and instructive parable of the talents, (Matt. xxv. 14.) There we read of one who digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money, and at his return digged it up again, and restored it to him in the same state he got it. In this, according to the general style of judging, there seems to be nothing culpable. The man, though not pro-

fitably active, was at least harmless. He took nothing from his master's talent, neither did he put it to any bad use. But what character did his lord give him, when he came to call for his account? This you may read at the 26th verse. "His lord said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant;" and, in conformity with this character, he pronounces on him this awful sentence, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Hence it appears, that not only the gross and flagitious transgressors of God's law, but even the slothful and careless, who neglect to improve the talents committed to them, are reckoned among the wicked, by the infallible Judge, in conformity with that decisive sentence of the apostle James, "To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." This at once undermines the foundation upon which thousands of deluded mortals build all their hopes of the divine favour and acceptance. In vain, O misguided men, will you plead at the great day, even though ye could prove that plea, that ye abused no talent bestowed on you—that you did harm to none of all God's works. Was it for this negative purpose only, do you think, that your Maker gave you a place in his world? Was it for this only, that he conferred the active powers of your nature; that he gave you reason to preside over these powers; and his word to guide that reason? Was it for this only that he placed you in a situation where activity is necessary for your own happiness, and for the happiness of all around you? Is it nothing that your being as a chasm in creation, where infinite wisdom intended that nothing should be void, nothing cumbersome nor unprofitable? The tree that bears no fruit, as well as that whose fruit is pernicious, is cut down and cast into the fire. In like manner, if

your lives have not been fruitful in the works of righteousness, if they have not exhibited positive evidences of love to God, and benevolence to men, your abstinence from gross transgressions will be of no avail. You will not indeed be ranked with those who proclaim their sins as Sodom; but yet you will be numbered with the wicked, and with them expelled for ever from the presence of the Lord.

But what shall we say of those who are not only harmless, but also good and useful members of human society; decent in their conduct, upright in their dealings, beneficent and obliging to all around them? Of such persons we are certainly bound to speak and to think well. Where those good fruits appear, we ought to conclude, that the tree which produces them is good likewise. It is a bold and impious invasion of the divine prerogative to judge the hearts of others; and nothing can be more opposite to the spirit of Christianity, than to harbour any secret suspicion of men's inward tempers, when their conduct is proper, inoffensive, and useful.

But if the question be put in another shape, What ought these persons to think of themselves? the word of God obliges me to give another answer.

There we are taught to exercise a perpetual jealousy over ourselves, and to take no credit from particular acts of virtue, if our character be not entirely formed by those principles which it alone inspires. Of these, one of the most commanding is mentioned in the text itself. "*It shall not be well with the wicked, because he feareth not before God.*" Were all the combinations of language to be studied, it would be impossible to devise an expression more significant than this, or more calculated to discriminate the steady and commanding motives of

virtue, from those which are unsound, accidental, and fluctuating.

The openly profane fear not God at all. The unprofitable servant, who buries his talent in the ground, fears him as an austere master, and by that slavish fear is restrained from making the proper improvement of it. The man who aspires only to decency, and outward propriety of conduct, is actuated by a fear which respects sometimes God, sometimes the reproofs of conscience, but most frequently the opinion of his fellow men. In contradistinction to all these partial and inadequate principles, the truly good man *fears before God*. He dreads him not as an enemy, but, conscious of his inspection at all times, he dreads every thing that would make this thought a terror to him. To this decisive test I must therefore lead you. Is the authority of God become the great consideration to which you bend all your sentiments and conduct? Have you been led to renounce the maxims of the world, and the inclinations of nature, and to make the will of God the standard of all you do, regardless of present danger or advantage? Unless this be the habitual frame of your souls, all your seeming virtues are no better than dead works; ye are still in the bond of iniquity, and have every reason to tremble at the denunciation in the text: "It shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he feareth not before God."

1st. It cannot be well with the wicked, because the consequences of their own conduct naturally involve misery. Independent of all the sanctions of the divine law, sin is in itself the destroyer of our happiness. There is so much slavery and distraction in obeying our corrupt passions, the consequences are so inconvenient and ruinous, that none ever followed such a course

without a secret consciousness of fatal mistake. To be happy, it is necessary that we be at peace with ourselves. But how can the wicked have this peace? Their minds, torn by contending passions, are like the troubled sea, which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. They may indeed dethrone their reason, and trample on their conscience; but yet the voice of these degraded faculties will at times be heard, and even in their scenes of riot and frantic mirth, will, like the hand-writing on the wall of Belshazzar's palace, embitter all their joys. Many sins are destructive of bodily health, as well as of peace of mind. This is confessedly the case with sensuality and intemperance. Others expose men to dreadful hazards, weary them with incessant toils, and at last plunge them in infamy and ruin. "Come, say they, let us lay wait for blood; let us lurk privily for the innocent; let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole, as those that go down to the pit; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil." But behold the issue of these criminal projects. "They lay wait for their own blood; they lurk privily for their own lives. Knowest thou not this of old, since man was placed upon the earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment. They have sown vanity, and they shall reap the whirlwind."

2dly. It cannot be well with the wicked, because they are in a state of distance and alienation from God. The glorious attributes of his nature are to them objects of terror and dismay, and the secret wish of their hearts is, that there were no God. But there is a God, O sinner! a God who hateth wickedness, and who will destroy all the workers of iniquity. He hath bent his bow, and made it ready; he hath also prepared for them the in-

struments of death. But O how hopeless a warfare is it to contend with him! Who ever hardened himself against God and prospered? Is there any strong hold, where the enemies of his government may be safe? Go try the whole extent of creation. Ascend to heaven, and he is there in the brightness of his majesty. Go down to the regions of darkness, and he is there in the severity of his justice. Take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there his boundless dominion extends; even there his right hand shall hold thee a prisoner to his vengeance. Listen, O sinner, to the tremendous declaration of this omnipotent, omnipresent God. "I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me; I kill and I make alive, I wound and I heal, neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand: for I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever. If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment, I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood."

3dly. It cannot be well with the wicked, because they lie under the guilt of all the sins which they have ever committed. A dreadful load! One sin ruined myriads of beings superior to man; how shall they escape, then, who from their youth upwards have drunk iniquity even as the ox drinketh water? It is possible that you may sooth yourselves with the thought of having repented of the grosser sins with which your lives have been stained; you trust that these are forgiven, and presume that a merciful God will overlook the rest. But I must be allowed to inform you, that this is a rash and groundless thought. There is no such thing with God as partial forgiveness. If all your sins are not pardoned, not one of them is; and unless you have been renewed

by the grace and Spirit of God, those sins you committed in your earliest years, are as much in force against you as those of the most recent date you can name. Conversion and pardon are inseparably connected; and it will ever remain a certain truth, that whom God justifies, them he also sanctifies. There is indeed no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; but, on the other hand, these are such as walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; for if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.

4thly. It cannot be well with the wicked, because, while they remain in this state, nothing they do can please God. I mean not to affirm, that they cannot perform actions materially good, the substance of which is commanded by God. The morality of Christ's religion is so much accommodated to the interest of individuals, and to the good of society, that even they, who have no higher motives, may find it profitable to comply with some of its injunctions. Far less is it my meaning, that it would be better, or as good, for such persons to neglect or disobey these injunctions. But my meaning is, that there are so many defects, and so much unsoundness of motive in their best actions, that God can have no delight in them, such as he has in the obedience of his own people, who are reconciled to him by the great Mediator.

They cannot so far please God as to render their persons acceptable to him; nor have they any promise that this partial obedience of theirs shall be recompensed with any favour or reward. The truth of these observations is confirmed by a multitude of passages of Scripture. There we are told, that the thoughts of the wicked are abominable to him; that the ploughing of the wicked is sin; that the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomina-

tion; yea, he that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer, saith Solomon, shall be an abomination unto God. And how can it be well with the man, whose whole life is a perpetual offence to the God that made him? Consider this, ye that now despise reproof, trample on the blood of Christ, and resist the motions of his Spirit. In vain do you rest on the favourable parts of your character, as a compensation for this ungrateful abuse of the divine goodness and long-suffering. In the sight of men, indeed, this balance may be of some avail to you; but God seeth not as man seeth. In his sight your whole character is depraved, and every part of your conduct offensive. I shall only add, in the

5th and *last* place, That if you die in this state, your perdition is inevitable. "Except a man be born again," saith our Lord, "he cannot see the kingdom of God." —"Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." These passages are plain and decisive; and I have selected them, among innumerable others to the same purpose, for this reason, that they were uttered by the firmest and tenderest friend of the human race, the truth of whose warnings we can have no reason to doubt.

IN reviewing what has been said, the impression left is undoubtedly gloomy, and nothing but a sense of duty could have prevailed on me to deliver so harsh a message. But that watchman would be very unfaithful to his trust, who would not call the alarm of fire, because of the unpleasant sound it has in men's ears. I have not been sternly delivering truths in which I have no concern myself. We are all embarked in the voyage of life upon the same conditions. These conditions I have endeavoured to set before you, according to that command-

ment of God, "Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him, for he shall eat the fruit of his doings; but wo to the wicked, it shall be ill with him, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he feareth not before God." Knowing, therefore, the terrors of the Lord, I have been endeavouring to persuade you to fly from the wrath to come.

The way to escape all this misery is patent, even to the chief of sinners. The door of mercy is open. God is seated on a throne of grace, ready to receive every humble penitent; and this is his call to the sons of men, "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?—Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.—Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.—Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your souls shall live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David." *Amen.*

SERMON LXIII.

REVELATION ii. 5.

Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

THESE are the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to the church of Ephesus. They contain a call to repentance and reformation, with a severe and terrible threat-

ening in case of disobedience. In the second and third verses, we have an acknowledgment of what was good in that church, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." Nevertheless, says he, in the 4th verse, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." Their affection was cooled, their zeal was abated, they were become more remiss and lukewarm in the duties of religion. Now, this our Saviour could not bear; he therefore calls them to remember their first estate, to consider their present degenerate condition, to mourn over it, and to rise from it by a speedy repentance and reformation. And to give this summons the greater efficacy, he threatens them with the removal of the gospel from them, if they did not repent: "I will come unto thee quickly, and remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent."

Many useful observations might be made from this passage; as, *first*, That our Lord Jesus Christ takes special notice of those to whom the gospel is sent. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; but he walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and carefully observes the improvement which men make of this precious light. This teaches us what manner of persons we ought to be. We are placed here, as it were, on a theatre, and act in the immediate view of our King and Judge. Yea, he hath in a manner entrusted us with his glory, and called the world to take notice of us, as the persons by whom he expects to be honoured, and therefore our behaviour cannot be indifferent to

him. He may wink at others, but cannot wink at us. The husbandman is not dishonoured by the unfruitfulness of a wild tree, upon which he has bestowed no culture; but the barrenness of what is planted in his garden, or inclosed field, reflects upon himself, and therefore he cannot be unconcerned about that, but must vindicate his honour upon it, by cutting it down, and casting it out as a cumberer of the ground.

Secondly. We may observe, that not only gross apostacy, but event he smallest decays among his people, are highly offensive unto him. This church had many good things among them, and after the commendation that was given them in the second and third verses, one would be ready to put the question, What lack they yet? But our Lord remarks the coldness of their hearts, and resents that inward and secret declension from their former love and zeal, and threatens them with swift destruction if they did not repent. O how does this magnify God's patience towards us! and what cause have we to tremble and be afraid of his judgments, seeing we have not only fallen from our first love, but by gross and open acts of enmity have made it extremely doubtful, whether there be any remains of love abiding with us at all? But, without insisting upon these, my design is, to consider this threatening separately by itself. And my method shall be,

I. To shew that God may be provoked by the sins of a people, to remove the gospel from them.

II. I shall represent to you the terribleness of this judgment. And,

III. Direct you to the proper use of this awful subject.

In the Scriptures we have many comfortable promises of the church's stability: it is built upon a rock, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. It was Christ's

promise to his apostles, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;" not with their persons, for these were soon to be removed out of the world by death, but with their doctrine, which was to endure throughout all generations; so that we have the fullest assurance, that the Zion of God, or the universal church, shall never perish; that the light of the gospel shall never be extinguished; but that the King of Zion shall always have subjects to serve him in some corner of the earth or other. But though the gospel shall never be removed out of the world altogether, yet it may be removed from particular places. The candlestick is a moveable thing, and not an entailed inheritance.

The Jews are an eminent instance of this. Never was a nation so highly favoured as they. To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; theirs were the fathers, and of them, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. They were God's chosen people, his peculiar treasure, his first born, and his spouse; for by these honourable titles were they long distinguished from the rest of the world. Nor were they only distinguished by titles, but actually blessed with all the privileges which these titles imported. God was indeed a father and husband unto them: he cherished them in his bosom, and employed his almighty power for their preservation. He conducted their arms, and dictated their laws; he formed their state, and was present among them by a visible glory, and established a method of correspondence, by which they might have constant access to him for counsel and direction in every case of difficulty. Never had any people such illustrious displays of the divine providence in their favours. Some nations have had a long tract

of prosperity, a series of lucky accidents, as it were, by the help of which they have grown up to a very flourishing condition; but the various steps of their advancement were visible, and easy to be accounted for, and were nothing more extraordinary than a plentiful crop after a favourable seed-time and harvest, or the riches of a skilful and industrious merchant. But it was not so with the nation of the Jews; their prosperity was the admiration of all that beheld it, and forced them to acknowledge that the Lord was with them of a truth. God brought them out of Egypt by a high hand and an outstretched arm; the sea opened a passage for their retreat, and overwhelmed their enemies; bread was given them from heaven, so that man did eat angel's food; and the flinty rock yielded them water to quench their thirst. At the prayer of Joshua the sun stood still; and at the same time God slew his enemies before him with hail-stones from heaven, and gave his people a miraculous and complete victory over them. And after they were put in possession of the promised land, they did not grow up like other states; they were oftentimes brought so low, that they seemed past recovery, and as often did God interpose for their relief; and the various changes they underwent were so sudden and surprising, as made it evident to themselves and all about them, that their affairs were conducted, not by the skill and strength of men, but by the immediate hand of God, who, by his irresistible power, governs all creatures and things, so that none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? Yet, notwithstanding all these titles, and privileges, and providences, whereby God distinguished them in such a remarkable manner, they are now pulled up by the roots, abandoned by God, and despised among men. No spiritual dew falls upon these mountains of

Gilboa. Those that were as pleasant to God as the grapes in the wilderness to a thirsty traveller, are now of as little regard as the heath or the bramble. Of a tender father, he is become their enraged enemy; and flings vengeance down upon those heads which before he crowned with mercy. He caused the land in which he planted them, by a series of miracles, to spue them out because of their sins; and now they wander as miserable vagabonds over the face of the world, a standing monument of God's righteous judgment, and a sad proof that spiritual privileges are not entailed to any nation; but that God may be provoked, by the sins of a people, to remove their candlestick out of his place, and punish them with darkness, who would not walk in the light of it whilst they enjoyed it.

The seven churches of Asia, mentioned in this and the following chapter, are another instance of this. These had their day, but are now benighted; the judgments threatened in these gracious epistles, which were directed to them, have been long ago inflicted. The banners of a blasphemous impostor have long triumphed over the standard of the gospel. Nor is the once famous church of Rome a great deal better; for though the gospel is still professed and honoured by them in appearance, yet the light of it is so much obscured, and buried amidst the rubbish of idolatrous opinions and practices, that it is scarce discernible; and without breach of charity we may say of them, that God hath given them up to strong delusions to believe a lie; so that they have all the marks of a people whom God hath abandoned, though wrath be not as yet come upon them to the uttermost. By these examples we see that the gospel is not the inheritance of any particular people, but that it frequently has been, and therefore may still be forfeited, and that

God may be provoked, by the sins of those who enjoy the light of it, to strip them of all their privileges, by removing the candlestick out of his place. Let us now proceed, in the

II. place, To consider the greatness of this punishment. And if we view it aright, we shall soon be convinced, that a more terrible judgment cannot be inflicted upon any people or nation. What can be more terrible than famine?—Parents have been forced, against all the ties of natural affection, to devour their own children, and children to feed upon the flesh of their parents. The extremity of hunger hath reconciled very delicate people to things that are most loathsome and nauseous, carrion, dung, and vermine of all sorts; yet this is accounted a small judgment when compared with the other, (Amos viii. 11.) “Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord.” The want of spiritual food is so much worse than the want of natural food, as the soul is better than the body; the one makes the body weak, the other starves the soul, and leaves it both weak and wicked; the one may be a means to make us seek the Lord, but the other leaves us in gross darkness, without either help or hope. The gospel is the sun that enlightens the mind, the rain that waters the heart; it is that divine seed by which the quickening Spirit renews the soul, and implants a principle of spiritual life, which shall issue in a glorious and eternal one. By this our souls are refined, and our lusts consumed; without this, we can have no prospect of a world to come, nor any knowledge of the way that leads to it, for life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel, and by it only we are told, that God is in Christ reconciling the

world to himself, not imputing their trespasses; and therefore the want of it must be the sum of all misery, and infinitely worse than any other calamity we can either feel or fear in this world. God may take notice of a people under the sharpest afflictions, but when he takes away his word, then he knows them no longer; then all gracious correspondence or intercourse is broken up. This, O this, is the very dregs of vengeance! Yea, when the gospel departs from a people, all other blessings commonly depart with it. This is the charter of all our privileges, both spiritual and temporal; and therefore in losing it we lose all that depends upon it, at least we forfeit our title; and any outward mercies that are continued with us, are only like food and raiment to a condemned criminal, which the King's clemency allows him till the fatal sentence be executed upon him.

The gospel is not only the glory, but the strength of a nation; when it departs, God ceases to be their protector. The flourishing condition of the seven churches soon withered when the candlestick was removed; and their deplorable and abject state ever since, even with respect to external enjoyments and worldly advantages, is a melancholy proof that the gospel does not take flight alone, but is attended with every other thing that contributes to the glory or happiness of a people.

Thus have I represented to you the terribleness of this judgment. And now I come to point out your concern in this subject, and to direct you to the proper improvement of it. And if these things be so, have not we in these lands great reason to fear, that our iniquities may provoke the Lord to inflict this punishment upon us? Are we better than Ephesus or the other churches of Asia? Are our privileges greater or better secured than theirs were? yet their candlestick has been long remov-

ed; and who dare affirm that ours may not be removed likewise? My brethren, I have no design to alarm you with groundless fears; but my duty as a watchman obliges me to blow the trumpet when I see danger approaching; and that I may give it a distinct sound, I shall briefly unfold to you the grounds of my apprehension of approaching danger in these following remarks: And,

1st, Is it not evident, that vice and immorality have grown up to an amazing height amongst us? Do not many proclaim their sins as Sodom, and hide them not? Yea, do not many glory in their shame, and count it their honour to excel in some branch of wickedness or other? I do not aggravate the charge; every one's observation must convince him of the truth of it. Now, what must be the fruit of this? Hear what God says by his prophet Joel iii. 13. "Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe, the press is full, the fat overflows; for their wickedness is great." I do not say we have just come this length, that we are already arrived at a fulness of iniquity; but surely we have for a long time been advancing towards it by very hasty steps. And this, I think, is one reasonable ground of fear.

2dly. Is there not a visible contempt of the blessed gospel? Are not the ordinances of religion slighted and despised? yea, is it not become fashionable among many, to reject the whole of Revelation as a cunningly devised fable, and to use all their influence to proselyte the more simple and unthinking to their opinion? Has not Deism, which began at court in King Charles II.'s reign, been still descending through all the inferior ranks, till now it has got low enough? And what does this presage? The Gadareans besought Christ to depart from their coasts, and got their request. The gospel is of too much

worth to be always exposed to the injuries of men, and forced upon a people against their will. When children throw a precious jewel in the dirt, what can be expected, but that their father should take it from them, and lay it in another place, and punish them too for their folly and ingratitude? A

3d Sign of approaching danger is the small success which accompanies the preaching of the gospel, even among those who profess to believe it. How few converts are born into the church! Is it not visible, that numbers who attend upon ordinances are still lying in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity? How few are seriously inquiring after the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward? And is not this too a presage of a departing gospel, when God ceases to pour oil into the lamp, to accompany the ordinances of religion with the influences of his Spirit? Surely we have reason to fear, that he intends to remove the candlestick to some other place, and to give it to those who will value it more, and make better use of it than we have done. A

4th Ground of fear is the present divided state of our church. Union is the strength of the religious, as well as of the civil society; for a house divided against itself cannot stand. It is a weighty saying of one upon this head, that when children fall out, and fight about the candle, the parents come and take it away, and leave them to decide their differences in the dark. We may justly fear that God will take away that light which we abuse in quarrelling, instead of walking and working by it. Add to all these, in the

5th place, The threatening aspect of divine Providence—the success of our enemies abroad, and the bold attempt, which is still carrying on, against our religion and liberties at home, and then judge whether there be

not sufficient grounds of fear. “Will a lion roar in the forest when he hath no prey? Will a young lion cry out of his den, if he have taken nothing? Can a bird fall in a snare upon the earth, where no gin is for him? Shall one take up a snare from the earth, and have taken nothing at all? Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it? The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?” My brethren, God has been speaking to us in a very awful manner for these six months past; and that we might not mistake his voice, most of the events that have fallen out in that space of time have been altogether surprising and unexpected. Our enemies themselves were amazed at their success, and ascribed it to the immediate hand of God, which favoured their enterprise; and the hand of God has been no less remarkably displayed in our benign deliverance. The retreat of the rebels, immediately after a victory, without facing an army they had so lately overcome, was so contrary to the general opinion, that I believe the wisest heads were afraid of some cunning artifice, some deep laid plot, to draw our men into a snare, from which they should not easily escape. In a word, man’s part of this whole affair has been so small and inconsiderable, that it is evidently the Lord’s own doing; and though he has employed instruments both to distress and relieve us, yet he has done it in such a sovereign manner, that he seems to have used them upon no other design but only to convince us that he can work without them. I confess, my brethren, the care which God has taken to make himself observable in the conduct of these occurrences, is one of the principal grounds of my fears at this time; nor are my fears a whit lessened by the late favourable

dispensation. I look upon it indeed as an intimation, that he who is a God of judgment is also a God of mercy; and that, notwithstanding all our past provocations, he is yet willing to be reconciled to us upon the terms of the gospel; and therefore I view it in the light of an encouragement to repentance, but not at all as a sign that God's anger is turned away from us, or a security that our danger is over. No, my brethren, the sun rose upon Sodom the morning of that very day in which it was consumed by fire from heaven. We have got a breathing time, a respite from judgment, but not a perfect deliverance; and if we do not improve the day of our visitation, this mixture of goodness with severity makes it only the more probable that the last exercise of God's patience is at hand, and that the things which belong to our peace are in the greatest danger of being hid from our eyes.

Thus then you see what grounds there are to fear, that the dreadful judgment threatened in the text may be inflicted upon us; and this, I hope, will dispose us all to listen to the exhortation here given us, "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works."

This is the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the only way to prevent the ruin of a sinful people. The substance of this exhortation I have frequently pressed upon you, and therefore I shall not now enlarge upon it; and every thing I have just now delivered to you, may serve as motives to induce you to comply with it. The candlestick may be removed from you. This deprivation of the gospel is the most terrible of all God's judgments; and as our sins deserve it, so God by his providence has actually been threatening us with it. O then let us be awakened from our security, let us value the gospel dis-

pensation, and improve it to the obtaining a gospel nature. Let us not loiter while the sun shines, lest we be benighted. It will not stand still at our pleasure, but will go its course according to the command of its Governor, and listens not to the follies of men, nor tarries for our delays. Let us then stir up ourselves to call upon our Lord, who is the Lord of Zion, and the protector and safeguard of our Jerusalem. Let us plead with him, as the disciples that were going to Emmaus, "Lord, abide with us, for the evening begins to come, and the day is far spent." Our Saviour did so, and gave them his blessing. He may do so with us likewise. He may return with a rich blessing to our land and church, and abide with us and our posterity till the day of glory break, and all the shadows fly away. *Amen.*

SERMON LXIV.

2 CHRONICLES v. 13, 14.

It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD, and when they lift up their voice, with the trumpets and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever, that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD: So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.

THE day of Pentecost excepted, when the Holy Ghost made a visible descent upon the apostles of our Lord, I look upon this to have been the brightest day of heaven

upon earth that ever the church of God was favoured with. It is impossible to conceive the joy, the wonder, the ecstasy of these devout worshippers, when they beheld the cloud, that well-known symbol of the Divine presence, and saw the temple filled with his glory. Solomon himself, as we learn from the 18th verse of the following chapter, was so overpowered with this extraordinary manifestation, that he made a sudden pause even after he had begun to pray; and, like one doubtful whether he should believe the testimony of his own senses, abruptly asks the question; "But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold! heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee, how much less this house I have built!"

It appears, from the last chapter of the book of Exodus, that when the tabernacle was first erected in the wilderness, God was pleased to take visible possession of it in a way similar to what is here recorded; and the effects (though not precisely the same) were very much akin to those I have now read to you: For we are there told, that Moses, the man of God, was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord had filled the tabernacle: But here the cloud not only filled the tabernacle, but the whole temple; and the Divine presence was displayed with such glory and majesty, that the priests who burnt incense at the golden altar, were obliged, at least for some time, to intermit the service. They could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.

I suppose I need scarcely observe to you, that such pompous and visible manifestations of the Divine presence are not to be expected in gospel days. The darkness of the former dispensation required those external

aids, and rendered them not only desirable but useful and necessary; but now that the darkness is dispelled, and the dayspring from on high hath visited us; the great objects of faith being freed from the thick veil of types and shadows, penetrate the mind without the assistance of our bodily senses, and make a deeper and more lasting impression upon the believing soul than the most splendid scenes the eye could behold.

Zion's glory doth not now consist in outward pomp and magnificence, but in the spiritual though invisible presence of her King, according to his own gracious promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;" and "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." When a divine power accompanies the ordinances of religion; when these waters of the sanctuary are impregnated with a healing and quickening virtue; when the souls of believers are enlightened and purified, revived and comforted, by the use of those means which Christ hath appointed, then is the temple filled with his glory; and there is no need of any visible cloud to convince the devout worshipper that his Lord is with him.

It has long been lamented, (would to God there was less cause for it) that this gracious presence of our Redeemer is sensibly withdrawn from our public assemblies. We have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us, what work the Lord did in their days, in the times of old; how his steps of Majesty have been seen in the sanctuary, and his arm revealed by its glorious effects, turning the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, enriching and beautifying the souls of his own people with righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

But, alas! How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed? These blessed fruits of gospel ordi-

nances are rarely to be seen in our day, and therefore is just ground for that mournful complaint, "The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed of the fire, the founder melteth in vain; for the wicked are not plucked away from their wickedness." Few, comparatively speaking, are now converted by the means of grace. And even among the few who have a name to live, the decayed and languishing state of vital Christianity is too observable to need any proof or illustration.

To what cause shall we impute this? Is God's arm shortened that it cannot save; or is his ear heavy that he cannot hear? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies? No, God is unchangeably the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, without any variableness or shadow of turning. He is the rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and inviolable fidelity. The blame, my brethren, lies at our own door. Our iniquities have separated between us and our God, and withhold good things from us. We do not cry to him with our hearts; we do not stir up ourselves to call upon God; our prayers are cold and lifeless; our praises languish and die on our lips; we rush upon ordinances without any serious preparation, and are neither suitably concerned to obtain the Divine presence, nor duly affected when we miss it.

That this is too frequently the case cannot be denied. Our own observation and experience must convince us of the truth of it. But may I not be allowed to hope that some, nay that many, have come up to this solemnity with longing desires to behold and admire the beauty of the Lord, and to feel the power of his grace in the sanctuary? May I not hope, that there is a goodly num-

ber in this large assembly, who have been pleading, like Moses, in their secret retirements, “I beseech thee, O Lord, shew me thy glory?”

Well, then, to such the passage I am now to discourse upon affords matter of useful and seasonable instruction, as it not only relates an extraordinary manifestation of the divine glory to his ancient church, but likewise informs us how the worshippers were employed at the time when that extraordinary manifestation was made. And I think the inference is perfectly just and natural, That if we desire and expect to share in their privilege, we ought, in so far as the difference of our circumstances will permit, to follow their example, and do what they did.

“It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord; and when they lift up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals, and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying, For he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever, that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.”

Where you may observe, in the

I. place, That the glory of God began to appear when the assembly were employed in praise and thanksgiving. This is a striking circumstance, and deserves our peculiar attention. Much time had been spent in solemn duties of another kind. Numerous and costly sacrifices had been offered up, as we read in the 6th verse of this chapter, even sheep and oxen that could not be told for multitudes. But these ritual parts of worship were all concluded before the cloud entered into the Temple. God delayed to honour them with this token of his fa-

your till the spiritual and heavenly exercise of praise was begun. This is by far the most acceptable service we can be engaged in, "Whoso offereth praise," says God, "glorifieth me." David knew this when he said, (Psalm lxix. 30, 31, &c.) "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also will please the Lord better than ox or bullock that hath horn or hoof." Praise honours God, and therefore he puts a distinguishing honour upon this duty. Prayer is an expression of our indigence and weakness. Thanksgiving expresseth our relish of the sweetness of benefits received; but praise rises above all selfish regards, and directly terminates on the greatness and amiableness of God himself. He loves our prayers, he loves our penitential tears and groans; but nothing pleases him so much as the cheerful adoration and praise of his people. Nay, penitential tears are no otherwise valuable than as they purge our eyes from the filth of sin, that we may behold more clearly the loveliness of God, and give him that glory which is due to his name. All the other duties of devotion are only means of preparation for this sublime exercise. The habitations of the blessed continually resound with the high praises of God. There the most perfect creatures, in their most perfect state, have this for their constant unwearied employment, "they rest not day nor night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

We are too backward, my brethren, to this heavenly exercise, and perhaps that is one reason why we enjoy so little of heaven upon earth. Did we praise God more, he would give us greater cause to praise him; but this we seldom think of. We beg hard for relief when we feel our necessities; but alas, how slowly do we return

to give glory to God. Let me therefore entreat you, in all your addresses to the throne of grace, to give praise and thanksgiving their due proportion. In days of humiliation, or in some special cases of distress, our sins and our dangers may have the greater share ; but ordinarily, as much of our time and thoughts should be employed in the humble and thankful adoration of the divine greatness and goodness, as is spent in confessing our sins, or begging those supplies which our wants require. That excellent model of devotion which Christ hath left to his church lays a solid foundation for this remark. It both begins and ends with adoration ; and of the six petitions which make up the body of the prayer, three directly relate to the advancement of God's glory. Nay, these three are first in order ; and we are taught to pray that God's name may be hallowed, his kingdom come, and his will done on earth as it is in heaven, before we ask any thing for ourselves in particular. Would we then feel the divine presence, would we see the glory of God in his Sanctuary. let us address ourselves to this high and heavenly work. The occasion of our meeting gives us a fair invitation to it. The great object which this day presents to us is the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. We are to behold Christ in the holy sacrament, evidently set forth as crucified before our eyes. And can we refrain from adoration and praise, whilst we contemplate Him who is the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person? Should we not rejoice and give thanks, when we are called to commemorate the unspeakable gift of God to men? Every Lord's day bespeaks our praise and thanksgiving ; but the peculiar language of a communion Sabbath is evidently this, " Let Israel rejoice in him that made him : Let the children of Zion be

joyful in their King. Praise ye the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant, and praise is comely."

II. It deserves our notice, that the subject of praise, which God honoured with this token of his acceptance, was his own goodness and everlasting mercy. And this, my brethren, is a most encouraging circumstance; for it plainly enough tells us, that God is best pleased with our praises, when we adore and celebrate those perfections of his nature, which dispose him to pity the miserable, and have the kindest aspect towards the children of men. The song that the priests were singing when the cloud entered into the Temple, had none of that rhetorical pomp which a cold heart may borrow from a warm imagination; it consisted of a few plain but gracious words, "The Lord is good, and his mercy endureth for ever." And whilst they sung this plain and artless song, God made a sudden display of his glory, and caused them to feel the happy effects of that goodness which they praised. And shall not their success encourage us to follow their example? They adored and celebrated the divine goodness when the Ark was brought into the Temple, which was only a typical representation of the Messiah who was to come: And shall we need any solicitation to adopt their song, who know that the mercy promised to the fathers, the consolation of Israel, is already come? especially while we attend upon that sacred ordinance, which is both a solemn commemoration of his past sufferings, and a pledge of his return to complete our salvation. Here, indeed, we have the brightest display of the goodness and everlasting mercy of God. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have eternal life; for God sent his Son into the

world, not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." Our great Redeemer is the liveliest image of infinite goodness, the messenger of the most unsearchable astonishing love, the purchaser of the most inestimable benefits that ever were revealed to the sons of men. "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend; but God commendeth his love towards us. in that whilst we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Can we doubt of the divine goodness after this costly expression of it? "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Behold, likewise, this adorable perfection shining through the whole of that gracious covenant, whereof this holy sacrament is the external seal. There you may see such sure, such great and wonderful mercies, freely given out to a world of sinners, as may remove all your suspicions of the divine goodness and mercy, and afford you constant matter of praise and thanksgiving. There you may see how unwilling God is that sinners should perish. There you may see an act of pardon and oblivion granted, upon the easy and reasonable condition of a believing, penitent, and thankful acceptance. The sins that men have been committing for many years together, their wilful, heinous, aggravated sins, you may there see pardoned by ascendant unwearied mercy; the enemies of God reconciled to him; condemned rebels saved from hell, nay, brought into his family, and made his sons. O what comfortable discoveries are these! The Old Testament saints saw them darkly through a veil, whereas we behold them with open face. God appears in his Son and covenant, to be not only good, but love itself. Let us then adore him in this amiable character; let us give him the glory of all his per-

fections; but especially let us praise him with thankful hearts, "because he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever."—A

III. Circumstance in the text, which claims our attention, is the seriousness and fervour of this devout assembly. It is said, that they lifted up their voice, and praised the Lord. Here they exerted their whole strength and activity, as if they had been ambitious to spend themselves in this heavenly employment. Would we then this day obtain a token of the divine acceptance, let us learn from their example to seek it by a fervent and lively devotion. Great is the Lord, says David, and therefore greatly to be praised. Accordingly, when he enters upon this important duty, in Psalm ciii, he begins with a solemn address to his own soul, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name." The devotiom of the soul is the soul of devotion; it is the praise and homage of the heart which God requires. If that is withheld, we have nothing else to offer him that is worthy his regard. We are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind; and what is the measure of our love, ought likewise to be the measure of our praise; for it is as impossible to exceed in the one as in the other. As we cannot love him too much, so neither can we praise him too highly. His greatness and his goodness infinitely surpass all that our minds can conceive, or our tongues express. But there is yet a

IV. Circumstance in the text, which deserves our particular notice upon this occasion, namely the harmony and unanimity of these ancient worshippers. "They were all as one, and made one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord." The importance of

this circumstance will appear in a stronger light, if we compare the passage now before us with that extraordinary manifestation on the day of Pentecost, which is related in the 2d chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. There we are told, that when the “apostles were all with one accord in one place, suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” Every one will be sensible that there is a very striking resemblance between these two illustrious events; and I cannot help thinking, that the oneness and harmony of the worshippers, on both these occasions, is mentioned with peculiar emphasis, as a distinguishing characteristic of those religious assemblies which God delights to honour with his presence.

We are told in cxxxiii^d Psalm, that where brethren dwell together in unity, there God commandeth the blessing; and our blessed Lord lays such stress upon unity of affection among his disciples, that he makes it an essential qualification of an acceptable worshipper; nay, he tells us, that where this is wanting, the person is disqualified for performing any service that is pleasing to God, (Matth. v. 23, 24.) “If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift;” If this doctrine of brotherly love has not an obvious foundation in the text, yet I can hardly think I need make any apology for mentioning it, seeing it has a broad foundation in other passages of Scripture, and is strictly connected with the great ordinance before us.—The sacrament of the supper is not only a solemn commemoration of our Saviour’s death, and of his wonderful love to sinners of mankind, but

was likewise intended to be a badge of love and union among his disciples. Of old, they who feasted upon the same sacrifice laid aside all enmity, and professed to be knit together in love and friendship. In like manner, all who partake of the great gospel sacrifice in the holy sacrament, are supposed to be members of one body, united under one head, our Lord Jesus Christ. “The cup of blessing which we bless,” says the Apostle, “is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? for we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.” It would be monstrous to see one member of the natural body hurting and destroying another; the mouth devouring the hand, or the hand plucking out the eye. It is no less monstrous and unnatural for one member of Christ’s mystical body to be at variance with another—to see those who partake of the table of the Lord, at the same time partaking of the table of devils, by entertaining hatred and malice in their hearts, by doing, or purposing to do, or even by wishing, any hurt to their brethren in Christ. Would we then obtain the divine presence and blessing on this solemn occasion? do we expect or desire that the King should sit at his own table this day, and impart to us the the fruits of his favour and love, let us be one among ourselves; let every bitter passion be put away; and let us put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness and long-suffering, forbearing one another, even as we look for forgiveness through the merits of Jesus, remitting to others their hundred pence, whilst we plead with God for the discharge of our ten thousand talents.

But the oneness here spoken of seems more immedi-

ately to respect their harmonious agreement in the great subject of their praise. They made one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, saying, "For he is good, and his mercy endureth for ever." And, when they thus concurred with heart and voice in extolling the goodness and mercy of God, "it came even to pass," says the sacred historian, "that the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the Lord; so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God." That agreement in prayer has a mighty efficacy appears from that gracious promise of the Lord, (Matt. xviii. 19.) "Again, I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." And my text affords a convincing proof, that agreement in praise has an equal efficacy to bring the glory of God into the assemblies of his people. We may at least take encouragement from it to make the experiment. We have been asking the divine presence by prayer; let us now go a little farther, and seek it in praise and thanksgiving. The EUCHARIST was the ancient name of the sacrament, which tells us that the sacramental devotions of the primitive church chiefly consisted in those laudable exercises I am now recommending; and certainly their example should have considerable weight with us.

Let none say, I am a guilty, depraved creature, and therefore groans, and tears, and sorrowful lamentations, become me better than the voice of praise; for if you are penitent, believing sinners, if, despairing of relief from any other quarter, you have fled to Christ, as your city of refuge, and taken sanctuary in his atoning blood and sacrifice,—praise is not only lawful, but highly becom-

ing, nay, a necessary part of your present duty;—the design of your redemption, the tenor of the Gospel Covenant, the glorious privileges to which you stand entitled, loudly demand this grateful return. “We are built up,” says Peter, “a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter ii. 5. And that praise is one of these spiritual sacrifices appears from the 9th verse, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

But alas! says one, what is all this to me? My harp must still hang upon the willows; for how shall I, a wretched captive, presume to sing the songs of Zion? No evidences of grace are legible in my heart. Grief and fear have so thoroughly possessed it, that the love of God can find no room. How then, or to what purpose, should I lift up my voice, whilst my soul is cast down and disquieted within me?—Now, to such I would answer in general, that, let your case be as bad as you suppose it, yet still you have cause to bless the Lord. If you cannot thank him for his special grace, yet surely you ought to praise him for his unwearied patience, and these offers of mercy which are daily tendered unto you: Bless him that you are still on earth, in the land of hope, and not confined to the regions of everlasting despair.

But I must not stop here. Come forward into the light, thou dark, discouraged soul, and, in the presence of God, give a true and proper answer to these few questions. Thou complainest of the want of love to God. and thy complaints indeed show that thou hast no *delighting, enjoying* love: But answer me,

1st, Hast thou not a *desiring, seeking* love? A poor

man who desires and seeks the world, shows his love to it as convincingly as the rich man who delights in it;—the tendency of the heart appears as truly in an anxious pursuit as in a delightful enjoyment. But, as the weakness of hope is frequently mistaken for the want of desire, I must ask you,

2dly, Do you not find a moaning, lamenting love? You show that you loved your friends by grieving for their death, as well as by delighting in them whilst they lived. If you heartily lament it, as your greatest unhappiness and loss, when you think that God doth cast you off, and that you are void of grace, and cannot serve and honour him as you would, this is an undoubted evidence that your hearts are not void of the love of God. Once more,

3dly, Would you not rather have a heart to love God than to have all the riches and pleasures in the world? Would it not comfort you more than any thing else, if you could be sure that he loveth you, and if you could perfectly love and obey him? If so, then know assuredly that it is not the want of love, but the want of assurance, that causeth thy dejection.

And therefore I charge thee, in the name of God, to render unto him that tribute of praise which is due. To be much employed in this heavenly duty, has an evident tendency to vanquish all hurtful doubts and fears;—by keeping the soul near to God, and within the warmth of his love and goodness;—by dissipating distrustful vexing thoughts, and diverting the mind to sweeter things;—by keeping off the tempter, who usually is least able to follow us when we are highest in the praises of our God and Saviour;—and especially by bringing out the evidences of our sincerity, while the chiefest graces are in exercise.

Praise brings comfort to the soul, as standing in the sunshine brings warmth to the body, or as the sight of a dear friend rejoices the heart, without any great reasoning or arguing in the case. Come then, my dear friends, and make the experiment. Obey that voice which proceedeth out of the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great." Let no voice be amissing on this solemn occasion, but let us all be as one, praising and thanking the Lord, while we commemorate his goodness and everlasting mercy; and then may we hope that he will grace our communion table with his presence, proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, and fill all the guests with the fatness of his house. *Amen.*

SERMON LXV.

EZEKIEL xxxvi. 31.

Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.

THE Jews were at this time captives in Babylon, and so dispersed through that vast empire, that they said of themselves, in the language of despair, "Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost; we are cut off for our parts." Even the Prophet himself looked on their case as so irrecoverable by human means, that, when God gave him

a visionary representation of their state, by a valley covered with dry bones, and put the question to him, "Son of man, can these bones live?" his answer was, "O Lord God, thou knowest." With thee indeed all things are possible: Omnipotence may do this great thing; but whether it shall be done, or by what means it may come to pass, thou, O Lord God, and thou only knowest.

Thus abject and hopeless was the condition of the Jews, when God published his gracious design to take them from among the heathen, and to bring them back into their own land, (ver. 28.) "Ye shall dwell," saith he, "in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses: and I will call for the corn, and will increase it, and lay no famine upon you. And I will multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field, that ye shall receive no more reproach of famine among the heathen." And then, even at this season of returning peace and plenty, at this season, which so often misleads and intoxicates the mind of man, "Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and for your abominations."

THE account which we have of these penitents furnisheth us with some very important instructions with regard to the nature of true repentance, which I propose, in the *first* place, to illustrate; and then to recommend their example to your imitation. And the

1st Instruction which we obtain from this passage is, That true repentance is the gift of God, and the peculiar effect of his Holy Spirit. The course of Providence is indeed admirably adapted to reclaim the sinner from the error of his ways. Bitterness is written as with a sun-

beam on the line of folly; and certain degrees of misery never fail to accompany our deviations from the path of duty. Yet so dead are men naturally in trespasses and sins, that nothing less than a divine power can render the best means of reformation effectual. Without this, judgments will harden rather than humble or reclaim the transgressor. We read of Ahas, king of Judah, that in the time of his distress, he did trespass yet more against the Lord. And we are told, in the book of Revelation, that the vials of wrath, which the angels shall pour out upon the men who have the mark of the beast, instead of leading them to repent and give glory to God, shall only cause them to blaspheme the name of God, who hath power over these plagues, and to curse the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores. The calamities with which the Jews were visited in their captivity to the king of Babylon, were in like manner unproductive of any genuine repentance in that stiff-necked people. They had not only polluted their own land, but had also profaned the name of God among the heathen whither they went, and continued to do so, until He whom they had offended had pity on them for his own name's sake, and gave them a new heart and a new spirit, having taken away the stony heart out of their flesh, and given them a heart of flesh.—A

2d Instruction which we derive from this passage is, That the grief and self-loathing of true penitents, do not flow so much from their feeling that sin is hurtful to themselves, as from the consideration of its own base nature and especially of the ingratitude which it carries in it towards a kind and merciful God: For when were the Jews to remember their own evil ways? When were they to loath themselves in their own sight for their iniquities and their abominations? Was it when they felt

the rod, and lay under the feet of their cruel oppressors? No; it was when they should be delivered out of their hands, brought back to their own country, and enriched with the multiplied fruits of their trees, and the increase of their fields. *Then* were their sins to rise up in their remembrance, filling them with grief and shame, for having offended a Being of such transcendant goodness, and unmerited condescension.

Times of calamity do indeed often produce a temporary humiliation and repentance, which for a time resemble the real feelings of penitence; but self-love alone is at the bottom of the appearance. The man is wearied of the inconvenience, but not weaned from the love of sin. But true penitence hath its source in a nobler principle, and is rather the child of love than of fear. It is the melting of the soul at the fire of divine love; it is the relenting of the prodigal son, when his injured father runs forth to meet him; it is the tear of gratitude, which bursts from the condemned criminal, when a pardon from his offended sovereign is put into his hands. It appears, in the

3d place, from this passage, That the soul's conversion to God is the great introductory blessing which renders all other blessings valuable. This is evident from the order in which God arrangeth his promises to his captive people. He first engageth himself to take away the provoking cause of his anger, and then to put away his indignation, to receive them graciously, and to love them freely. The disease began within, and the cure must begin there likewise. Their captivity by men was the fruit of their voluntary captivity to sin, and therefore deliverance from sin must precede their deliverance from the hands of men. This God undertakes to perform by the powerful agency of his Holy Spirit.

“A new heart,” saith he “will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh; and I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them,” verses 26, 27. After which he gives the promise of temporal deliverance in the verses immediately preceding my text. And to shew that this was no accidental arrangement, he declares with great solemnity, at the 33d verse, that in this very order he had meditated to dispense his mercy. “Thus saith the Lord God, in the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the wastes shall be builded.”

These are the instructions which we may derive from this passage with regard to the nature of true repentance; and it is only to be added, although not expressly contained in the text, that as this great and valuable blessing cometh down from the Father of lights, who is the author of every good and perfect gift, it is therefore to be sought by our humble supplications and prayers: “For thus saith the Lord God,” at the 37th verse of this chapter, “I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.” God indeed is often found of those who seek him not. His powerful grace sometimes arrests the sinner in his mad career, while he is equally unmindful of God and of himself. But let none despise the use of means, because He who is almighty at times acts without them. It is our part to place ourselves in the way of his mercy, and to wait patiently at the pool until the angel trouble the waters, and communicate to them a healing virtue. It is our part to seek the Lord while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near, having the certain assurance that he

never said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek ye my face in vain. And this leads me to the

II. Thing proposed, which was to recommend the example of these penitents described in the text to your imitation. In the

1st place, then, Let me call upon you to remember your ways. The neglect of serious consideration is the ruin of almost every soul that perisheth eternally. Hence it is that we continue in our sins, and that we relapse after having forsaken them; that we decline from our religious attainments, and being again entangled in the pollutions of the world, that our last state becomes worse than our first. All these evils flow from a thoughtless unreflecting life. A great part of mankind pass their days in a course of perpetual dissipation, without once reflecting on their actions, until the near view of an eternal world awakens them from this fatal security. Then, indeed, the case is extremely altered—then the remembrance of his ways forceth itself upon the sinner—then he sees his error, and lament his folly, and prays for mercy, and even asks the prayers of those whom once he derided as precise and fanatical. He would not reflect upon the great truths of religion while he might have done it to a good purpose. Now he reflects, and reflects at leisure; but it is a cruel leisure, for the fruits of it are perplexity and dismay.

God is represented, by the prophet Jeremiah, as putting this question, “Why is the people of Jerusalem slid-
den back with a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast
deceit, they refuse to return.” Jer. viii. 5. The answer
is given in the following verse, “I hearkened and heard,
but they spake not aright; no man repented him of his
wickedness, saying, What have I done?” The conse-
quence of which was, “Every one turned to his course,

as the horse rusheth into the battle." Whereas, did we seriously ask ourselves that important question, What have we done? we would soon discover so much guilt in our doings, as to be compelled to ask ourselves another question, What shall I do to be saved?

Let me then prevail with you seriously and impartially to examine your past conduct. Consider what hath been the prevailing course of your life; and rest not satisfied with a general conviction that it hath been wrong, but labour to recollect as many passages of it as you can. Review all its different periods since you came to the years of understanding. Consider the various relations in which you have been placed, the special duties which arose from those relations, and the manner in which you have performed them. This will be a task displeasing indeed to the flesh, and mortifying to the natural pride of your hearts. But you must not hearken to these pernicious counsellors. The more they cry out, Forbear, the more resolutely must you persist. Charge your consciences with it as a religious duty, and implore the Holy Spirit of God to assist your endeavours. When by such means you have discovered your own evil ways, then proceed to consider attentively the nature and degree of that evil which is in them. Let it not suffice to know that you have been sinners, without pondering the dreadful malignity and demerit of sin. View it in its natural turpitude and deformity, as the plague and leprosy of the soul, which renders you loathsome and abominable in the sight of your Maker. View it as a daring act of rebellion against the most righteous authority, as the transgression of a law which is in all respects holy, just, and good; the precepts of which are not only reasonable in themselves, but also most kind and salutary to us. View it as the basest ingratitude towards your best and

most unwearied benefactor. View it, above all, in the severity of the punishment which it deserves, exemplified in those mysterious and inconceivable sufferings which the Son of God underwent to expiate its guilt.

See here, O sinner, the awful demerit of thy transgressions. Thou wast doomed to the wrath of God, and to everlasting banishment from his presence; and thou wast not only incapable to deliver thyself by any works or sufferings of thy own, but all the angels in heaven could not have offered a price that would have ransomed thy perishing soul. None else could pay thy debt but the Son of God, and even he could pay it in no other way than by suffering the penalty which thou hadst incurred. O how hateful doth sin appear when viewed in this light! Adam's expulsion from paradise, the deluge of the ancient world, the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, loudly proclaim its pernicious nature and heinous demerit. We feel it to be hurtful in the natural evils of sickness and pain to which it hath subjected us. Death, which is its wages, is an awful monitor of its malignant effects. It appears terrible in the worm that never dieth, and in that fire that is not quenched. But no where doth it appear so deformed and odious as in the sufferings and death of Christ; for how deep must that stain have been, which nothing could wash away but the blood of the Son of God! How deadly that disease which no other medicine could cure!

But as these considerations are applicable to all sins in common, it will be necessary, in order to your forming a just estimate of your own evil ways, to look more narrowly into the aggravating circumstances with which they have been attended.

Have not many of your transgressions been committed with knowledge and deliberation, nay, with artifice

and cunning? Have they not cost you no small degrees of study, before those desires which lust conceived were accomplished in actual sin? Have you not courted temptation, and wearied yourselves with committing iniquity? Consider what degrees of resistance from your own minds you have vanquished; what obstacles in Providence you have overcome; what strivings of the Holy Spirit you have defeated in the course of your transgressions. Nay, have not some of your sins been still more aggravated by the breach of express vows and resolutions against them, often repeated with the greatest solemnity? Hide not your eyes from any of these aggravating circumstances which have attended your offences. Every sin which you wilfully cover, or extenuate, will thereby gain an invincible addition of strength. Every lust which you conceal in your bosom, will become a viper which one day will sting you to the heart. Every good disposition, which you magnify, shall languish and pine away; and those treasures of grace, with which the humble are enriched, shall be of no advantage to you, till you feel your poverty and wretchedness. Let me therefore call on you to exercise the

2d Branch of repentance, which is here exemplified to us, viz. Loathing yourselves in your own sight, for your iniquities and your abominations. And say, O sinner, is there not cause for this? Dost thou loath that which is deformed and filthy? "We are all," saith the prophet Isaiah, "as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores." Thou art displeased with thine enemies who seek to injure thee; but where is there such an enemy as thou art to thyself?

Men may wrong thee in thy temporal interests, but no man, nay, no created being, can ruin thy soul without thine own concurrence. It is thou, and none else, that hast wounded thy conscience, and thrown away thy peace, and exposed thy soul to everlasting misery. Thou abhorrest him who hath killed thy dearest friend; but where hadst thou ever such a friend as the Lord Jesus Christ, whom, by thy sins, thou hast crucified and slain? Thy sins brought him down from heaven to earth; thy sins subjected him to poverty, persecution, and reproach; thy sins involved him in conflicts dreadful and unutterable, nailed him to the cross, and laid him low in the grave. By thy sins thou hast often trampled on his blood, crucified him afresh, and put him to an open shame. Is there not cause then to loath thyself in thine own sight for thine iniquities and for thine abominations? But as there are several counterfeits of this penitent disposition, it may be proper to mention a few of them, that you may have a clearer view of that self-loathing which I am desirous of recommending to you.

A man who, by his base, unworthy behaviour, has forfeited the esteem of the world, may feel much inward shame and uneasiness on that account, which may be mistaken by others, and even by himself, for true humiliation. And yet, though he seem to loath both himself and his sins, he doth neither truly, and there is nothing genuine or promising in this kind of remorse. If the world would be reconciled to him, he would soon be reconciled himself; for at bottom he hath no other quarrel with his sins, but that they happen to be disgraceful in the eyes of those whose esteem he would wish to preserve.

In like manner a natural conscience, irritated by some flagrant violation of the law of God, may severely sting

the offender with shame and remorse. Yet when narrowly examined, this shame amounts to no more than a proud vexation, that he cannot think so well of himself as he would wish to do. If the exchange could be made, he would rather part with that conscience which gives him uneasiness, than with those sins which occasion its reproofs; and his only motive in condemning his sins is, that he may pacify that awful monitor. Nay, a man may advance a step farther, and make still nearer approaches to the gracious temper described in the text, without fully attaining it. He may see the baseness and deformity of sin, and be deeply afflicted at the remembrance of his multiplied transgressions, and yet, through ignorance of the inbred corruption of his nature, he may be far from loathing himself in the spirit of true penitence.

What a beast was I, may he say, to act in a manner so reproachful to my faculties? Had I not reason to direct me? Could I not have governed my will and affections? Was I not master of my own heart and ways? Thus he may complain, and seemingly condemn himself; but this self-condemning language is in truth the expression of reigning pride, even as none are more severe in blaming themselves for misconduct in their worldly affairs, than those who have the highest opinion of their ability to manage them aright.

In opposition to this, the truly convinced sinner sees himself to be all guilt, pollution, and weakness, destitute equally of righteousness and strength. He is led to see that corrupt fountain of inward enmity to God, which is manifested in the issues of his outward conduct. He is made sensible, that he “was conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, and that in him, that is in his flesh, dwelleth no good thing.” On these accounts he loaths himself in his own sight, not partially or occa-

sionally only, for having acted a wrong part, which he supposes that by prudence he might have avoided, but universally as a degenerate and corrupted being. He can find nothing to be proud of, nothing that he can call his own, but guilt, disorder, and weakness. And under this conviction, he falls down before God, saying with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes."

This is that self-loathing which I now call upon you to exercise. And the necessity of it is apparent; for until you are brought thus low in your own estimation, you will never esteem the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can save you from the wrath to come. Who is it that values a physician while he feels no disease, and hath no fears of death? Will any fly to Christ for refuge, who is not sensible that he stands in need of such a Saviour? No; they only who are perishing in their own apprehensions will welcome the tidings of a Redeemer, and look to him, as the stung Israelites looked to the brazen serpent, lying prostrate at his feet, and resigning themselves wholly to his disposal and government.

LET me then conclude with exhorting you to repair to that fountain which is opened for sin and for uncleanness, to that blood which can cleanse you from all sin. This is the proper use and improvement of all that hath been said. Here is a remedy for all your diseases, a full supply for all your wants. Here you will find gold tried in the fire, that you may be rich; and white raiment, that you may be clothed, and the shame of your nakedness do not appear. The Lord Jesus is a complete Saviour. Be your burden what it will, he is able to support it. His merit surpasseth your guilt by infinite degrees; and his victorious spirit can subdue and mortify

your most imperious lusts. Let what hath been said, then, lead you to him. Dwell on the consideration of your own vileness, till your self-confidence is entirely destroyed, and your hearts disposed to receive him as the unspeakable gift of God to man.

In this your Christianity doth consist, and on this your justification depends. This is the sum of your conversion, and the very soul of the new creature. Other things are only preparatives to this, or fruits that grow out of it. Christ is the end and fulfilling of the law, the substance of the gospel, the way to the Father, the help, the hope, the life of the believer. If you know not HIM, you know nothing; if you possess not HIM, you have nothing; and if you be out of HIM, you can do nothing that hath a promise of salvation. O then fly to him as your refuge and sanctuary, and commit your souls into his hands, that he may purify and form them for himself. Plead in the language of David, (Psal. li. 2.) “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Purge me with hysop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” And look by faith for the accomplishment of that promise, (Ezekiel xxxvi. 25.) “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” *Amen.*

SERMON LXVI.

JOB xxxvi. 21.

Take heed ; regard not iniquity ; for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction.

THESE words were addressed to Job, who from the height of prosperity was suddenly plunged into the deepest and most complicated distress. They are the words of Elihu, the youngest, but by far the wisest and most candid of all Job's friends. The other three were indeed, as himself had styled them, miserable comforters. It was their belief, that adversity was in all cases a certain token of God's displeasure; and, upon this principle, they endeavoured to persuade this excellent servant of God, that his whole religion was false and counterfeit, that divine justice had now laid hold of him, and that he was suffering the punishment of his hypocrisy and iniquity.

At length Elihu interposes; and moved with zeal for the honour of God, and with compassion to his friend, he unfolds the mysteries of Divine Providence, asserts and proves that affliction is designed for the trial of the good, as well as for the punishment of the bad, directs Job to the right improvement of his present distress, and comforts him with the prospect of a happy deliverance from it, as soon as his heart should be thoroughly moulded into a meek and patient submission to the will of his God. At the same time, he rebukes him with a becoming dignity for some rash and unadvised speeches which

the severity of his other friends, and the sharpness of his own anguish, had drawn from him; and particularly cautions him in the passage before us, “Take heed; regard not iniquity; for this hast thou chosen rather than affliction.”

The latter part of the text contains an heavy censure, for which some of Job’s impatient wishes for relief had no doubt given too just occasion. But these expressions, uttered in his haste, he afterwards retracted, and finally came out from the furnace of affliction, like gold tried and refined by the fire.—What I propose, in discoursing on this subject, is to illustrate and prove the general proposition, that there can be no greater folly than to seek to escape from affliction by complying with the temptations of sin; or, in other words, that the smallest act of deliberate transgression is infinitely worse than the greatest calamity we can suffer in this life.

That the greater part of mankind are under the influence of the contrary opinion, may be too justly inferred from their practice. How many have recourse to sinful pleasures to relieve their inward distress? What unlawful methods do others use for acquiring the perishing riches or honours of this world? while, in order to evade suffering for righteousness sake, thousands make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, through sinful compliances with the manners of the world, against the clear and deliberate conviction of their own minds. These things plainly shew, that the subject I have chosen is of the highest importance; and if what may be said on it shall be so far blessed to any, as to render sin more odious, or affliction less formidable, I shall gain one of the noblest ends of my office, and we shall have reason to acknowledge, that our meeting together has been for the better and not for the worse.

In proof, then, of the general proposition, That there can be no greater folly than to choose sin rather than affliction, let it be observed,

I. THAT sin separates us from God, the only source of real felicity. That man is not sufficient to his own happiness, is a truth confirmed by the experience of all who have candidly attended to their own feelings. It is the consciousness of this insufficiency of the human mind for its own happiness, which makes men seek resources from abroad; which makes them fly to pleasures and amusements of various kinds, whose chief value consists in filling up the blanks of time, and diverting their uneasy reflections from their own internal poverty. But these are vain and deceitful refuges of lies. The want remains; and we have found out only the means of putting away the sense of it for a time. God alone can be the source of real happiness to an immortal soul, an adequate supply to all its faculties, an inexhaustible subject to its understanding, an everlasting object to its affections.

Sin bereaves the soul of man of this its only portion. "Behold," saith the Prophet, "God's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that it cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear." Affliction, on the other hand, instead of separating the soul from God, is often the means of bringing it nearer to him. Let a man be ever so poor, diseased, reproached, persecuted, still if he hold fast his integrity, if he be a real saint, he is near and dear to God. The eyes of the Lord are upon him, and his ears are open to his cry. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about him, and a guard of angels wait to carry his departing spirit into Abraham's bosom.

Whereas sin renders us loathsome in the eyes of God. He is angry with the wicked every day; and even their prayers and sacrifices are an abomination to him. He hath bent his bow, and made it ready; he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death. God looks on them with abhorrence, and, when conscience is awake, they think of him with horror, and dare not come into his presence, knowing that he is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity.

II. AFFLICTION may not only consist with the love of a father, but may even be the fruit of it. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.—By this,” saith the prophet Isaiah, speaking of affliction, “shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit to take away sin.” David could say, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept thy word.” A good man may even glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto him. But sin is always both evil in its own nature and pernicious in its effects. This contrast is very strikingly displayed by the apostle Paul. Of the one he speaks as a privilege, and a token for good to those who are exercised thereby. “Unto you,” saith he, (writing to the Philippians, i. 29.) “it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” But what doth he say concerning the other, (Rom. vii. 24.) “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” If any had ever reason to complain of the burden of affliction, Paul had more—“in labours more

alas! it seems to be as their meat and drink to obey the commands of sin, by fulfilling the lusts thereof. In vain hath the word of God and providence admonished them, that nought but bitterness is to be found in the path of folly. They still pursue that path, in defiance of their own experience, and weary themselves with committing iniquity. They-break through all restraints, not only when an angel stands in the way, but where ruin, misery, and destruction, stare them broad in the face. How many are to be seen bound with the cords of their own sins, from which they have neither the inclination nor power to free themselves? How many wasted and maimed by criminal indulgence? How many brought to poverty and rags, by riot and intemperance? "Who hath wo? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? they that tarry long at the wine, they that go to seek mixed wine." Sin has had its martyrs as well as godliness, who, in premature old age, have been made to possess the transgressions of their youth, in all the bitter fruits of a body tortured with diseases, and a spirit wounded with remorse.

Let us then be warned, ere it be too late, against the fatal error referred to in the text; the preference of the momentary pleasures of sin, to the salutary discipline of affliction. Let us never allow ourselves to imagine, that any present pleasure or advantage of sin will compensate the dreadful evils which it carries in its train; but uniformly oppose, to every such suggestion of a deceived mind, that important and solemn question which our Lord addressed to the multitude, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

2dly. Let us examine ourselves carefully, whether our judgment and choice have been rectified on this important point. What is it that affects us with the deepest concern and sorrow; the adverse events in providence, or the sins by which we have incurred the loss of the divine favour? When the hand of God lies heavy on us, what do we desire with the greatest earnestness? whether is it to have the trial sanctified, or to have it removed? What is the chief object of your ambition? Is it to grow in grace, and in conformity to the image of God? or is it to become great, and prosperous, and powerful in the world? Were God now to put wisdom or riches in our choice, as he once did to Solomon, would we determine as he did? or would we grasp at the riches, leaving it to age and experience to bring wisdom along with them in the ordinary supposed course of things? In what character does Christ appear most amiable to us, as a Saviour from punishment, or as a Saviour from sin? Finally, in what view does heaven appear most worthy of our desires and wishes; as a place of deliverance from suffering, or as a state of perfect freedom from sin and infirmity of every kind, where we shall be enabled to serve God with the entire affections and powers of our whole nature?

By these marks let us try the real state of our characters, that so we may not pass through life with a lie in our right hands; but knowing that we are of the truth, may assure our hearts before God, looking for his mercy unto eternal life. *Amen.*

SERMON LKVII.

2 CORIN. v. 1.

For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

THE prospect of a blessed immortality is one of the most powerful supports to the people of God, amidst all the trials of their present state; and therefore hope is compared to an anchor, which being cast within the veil, keeps the soul firm and unmoved, so that nothing from without can disturb its inward peace and tranquillity. This was the true foundation of that courage and constancy with which the apostles and primitive Christians endured and overcame the most grievous sufferings. Faith presented to their view a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; in comparison of which their present afflictions appeared so light and momentary, that they were incapable of giving them much pain or uneasiness, as the Apostle more fully declares in the close of the preceding chapter. And being unwilling to leave such an agreeable subject, he further enlarges upon it in the words of my text: "For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Death itself can do us no real prejudice; on the contrary, we have reason to welcome it as a friend, because, when it beats down these tenelements of clay in which we are lodged, or rather impi-

soned upon earth, it only opens a passage for us into a far more commodious and lasting habitation, where we shall possess the greatest riches, the highest honours, and the most transporting pleasures, without intermission, and without end.

I. He compares the body to an earthly house, yea to a tabernacle or tent, which is still less durable, and more easily taken down; and therefore the dissolution of such a frail thing ought not to be reckoned a very great calamity. To this he opposes, in the

II. place, The glorious object of the Christian hope, which he calls a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—And,

III. He expresses the firm persuasion which he had, in common with all true believers, of being admitted into that glorious and permanent dwelling-place, as soon as the earthly tabernacle should be dissolved.

Each of these particulars I shall briefly illustrate, and then direct you to the practical improvement of the whole.

I BEGIN with the first of these heads, which respects our state and condition upon earth. And in the description here given us, there are several things that deserve our notice.

1st. The body is called a house; and it may well get this name, on account of its curious frame and structure, all the parts of it being adjusted with the greatest exactness, insomuch that there is not one member redundant nor superfluous, nor any thing wanting that is necessary either for ornament or use.

But it is principally with relation to the inward inhabitant that the body gets the name of a house in the text. It is a lodging fitted up for the soul to dwell in. It is the residence of an immortal spirit, and from thence it

SERMON LXVII.

2 CORIN. v. 1.

For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

THE prospect of a blessed immortality is one of the most powerful supports to the people of God, amidst all the trials of their present state; and therefore hope is compared to an anchor, which being cast within the veil, keeps the soul firm and unmoved, so that nothing from without can disturb its inward peace and tranquillity. This was the true foundation of that courage and constancy with which the apostles and primitive Christians endured and overcame the most grievous sufferings. Faith presented to their view a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; in comparison of which their present afflictions appeared so light and momentary, that they were incapable of giving them much pain or uneasiness, as the Apostle more fully declares in the close of the preceding chapter. And being unwilling to leave such an agreeable subject, he further enlarges upon it in the words of my text: “For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” Death itself can do us no real prejudice; on the contrary, we have reason to welcome it as a friend, because, when it beats down these tenements of clay in which we are lodged, or rather impri-

soned upon earth, it only opens a passage for us into a far more commodious and lasting habitation, where we shall possess the greatest riches, the highest honours, and the most transporting pleasures, without intermission, and without end.

I. He compares the body to an earthly house, yea to a tabernacle or tent, which is still less durable, and more easily taken down; and therefore the dissolution of such a frail thing ought not to be reckoned a very great calamity. To this he opposes, in the

II. place, The glorious object of the Christian hope, which he calls a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.—And,

III. He expresses the firm persuasion which he had, in common with all true believers, of being admitted into that glorious and permanent dwelling-place, as soon as the earthly tabernacle should be dissolved.

Each of these particulars I shall briefly illustrate, and then direct you to the practical improvement of the whole.

I BEGIN with the first of these heads, which respects our state and condition upon earth. And in the description here given us, there are several things that deserve our notice.

1st. The body is called a house; and it may well get this name, on account of its curious frame and structure, all the parts of it being adjusted with the greatest exactness, insomuch that there is not one member redundant nor superfluous, nor any thing wanting that is necessary either for ornament or use.

But it is principally with relation to the inward inhabitant that the body gets the name of a house in the text. It is a lodging fitted up for the soul to dwell in. It is the residence of an immortal spirit, and from thence it

derives its chief honour and dignity. As God created this earth, before he made any of the creatures which were to inhabit it, and as the world was completely furnished with every thing necessary and desirable, before man, its intended sovereign, was introduced; so likewise, in the formation of man, God began with the body, and first completed the outward fabric, before he breathed into it a living soul. How foolish then are they who spend all their thoughts and cares upon the bodies, and overlook those immortal spirits within, for whose use and accommodation they were solely intended; especially when it is considered, in the

2d place, 'That the body was not only made for the service of the soul, but that it is likewise composed of the meanest materials, even of that dust which we trample under foot. Upon this account the Apostle calls it in the text, not merely a house, but an earthly house. Thus we are told, (Genesis ii. 7.) "that the Lord God formed a man of the dust of the ground." None of us can claim an higher extraction. We may all say to corruption, Thou art my father, and to the worm, thou art my mother and my sister. And as the body is an earthly house with respect to its original, so it is constantly supported and repaired by that which grows out of the earth, "The king himself," saith Solomon, "is served by the field;" yea, after a little time, we must all be reduced unto earth again. These bodies will shortly mix with the common clay. Dust we are, and unto dust we shall return. This, I confess, is a very humbling representation; but as it is true, it ought not to be slightly regarded by any of us; and young people, in a peculiar manner, may reap much advantage from it. You perhaps are strong and healthy, and, with respect to outward form, either have, or fancy you have, advantages

beyond others. Come hither, then, and view yourselves in the glass of my text. Your bodies, in their highest perfection, are but earthly houses; and after all the pains you can take upon them, their beauty will shortly consume like the moth. If age do not wrinkle it, death will dissolve it. The comeliest body shall ere long be as loathsome as the dirt on the streets, and must be buried several years out of sight too, before it can be borne with as well. Need I tell you then, that the noble inhabitant within is by far most worthy of your care and attention. Here your labour can never be lost; for when the dust shall return to the earth as it was, the spirit shall return to God who gave it; it survives the ruins of this earthly tenement, and, if adorned while here with the beauties of holiness, it shall flourish eternally in the presence of God, in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore. Be persuaded, then, my dear friends, to make the improvement of your souls your principal study. They were made at first after the likeness of God, and herein consisted both their glory and felicity. Let this then be your highest ambition, your constant unwearied endeavour, to get this divine image re-instamped upon them, that being purged and refined from all your dross, you may become meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

3d. It deserves our notice, that the Apostle not only calls the body an earthly house, but the earthly house of a tabernacle, to make us still more sensible of its meanness and frailty. A tabernacle or tent, you know, is a very slender habitation—a few slight poles put in the ground, and a piece of canvass, or painted cloth, thrown over them; yet such is the body of a man, a fair but frail tenement, liable to be thrown down, or torn in pieces by every blast of wind. At any rate, we are told, in the

4th place, That these earthly tabernacles must at length be dissolved. Death will soon plant its batteries against them; this king of terrors will storm them with troops of pains and diseases, and shall in the issue so far prevail, as to dislodge the soul from the body, and throw down the house of clay, crumbling it into that dust from which it was taken. This is not a bye-law that binds only a few, but an universal royal statute that stands in force against the whole human race. "It is appointed for all men once to die," saith this Apostle; hence the road to the grave is called the way of all the earth, and the grave itself is styled in Scripture, the house appointed for all living. Even the bodies of the saints, which have been the temples of the Holy Ghost, are subject to this awful decree; they too must be dissolved and see corruption; but with this material difference, that in due time they shall be raised up again in glory and incorruption. Nor shall their souls for any space be destitute of an habitation; for, as the Apostle here informs us, "they have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." And this is the

II. BRANCH of the text, upon which I shall offer a few obvious remarks. I suppose you have already observed, that this figurative description of the future happy state of the saints, is conceived in terms of opposition to their present state of frailty and mortality. Once, indeed, the Apostle calls the body a house, but he immediately explains his meaning, by calling it a tabernacle, a slender thing which is easily taken down, or moved out of its place; whereas their future abode is styled an house, without any diminishing epithet, a place of rest and safety, where they dwell with God the great Master of the family, and enjoy the sweetest communion with

the Father of their spirits, and all those social pleasures which the company and conversation of their brethren and fellow-servants can be supposed to give them.

Our blessed Lord, in his last consolatory discourse to his disciples, made choice of the same similitude, as best adapted to dispel that gloom which was hanging over their minds. "In my Father's house," said he, "are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." And is not this, my brethren, a delightful representation of the saint's felicity? Every word is full of melody. The very notion of an house or home is agreeable, especially to a poor pilgrim, who is tossed and persecuted in a malignant world, and perhaps, like his great Master, has not where to lay his head. But to what a height must our joy arise, when we hear that this is the house of God himself, the house of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, where we shall dwell with our dearest friend and benefactor, and have a place allotted us in those happy mansions which his blood hath purchased, and his infinite love hath prepared for us.

This house is farther described by the builder of it. The great God is the architect; and therefore we may be assured that nothing is wanting that can render it a fit habitation for his people. It is a house not made with hands; it was not built by any creature, neither was it formed out of any pre-existent matter, but created immediately by God himself. It is called his building by way of eminence. All things were made by him; but this was intended for the master-piece of his works, the brightest display of his creating power and goodness.

This house is farther described by its situation; it is

a house in the heavens. The earth which we now inhabit is a valley of tears, a place of exile, a common inn as it were, where clean and unclean, saints and sinners, meet together, and are promiscuously entertained. Here the godly live as in a strange land, amidst the enemies of their Father and their King, where their righteous souls are vexed from day to day, with the unlawful deeds and filthy conversation of those among whom they are obliged to dwell. But heaven is a place of perfect purity, where there is nothing that defileth, nothing to hurt or destroy. None shall be able to ascend into that hill of God, none can dwell in that holy place, but such as have clean hands and pure hearts; who are washed, and sanctified, and justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. And,

Last of all, this house in the heavens is farther described and commended by its duration. It is not subject to decay or dissolution, it is in eternal house, an incorruptible inheritance, a kingdom that cannot be shaken. All other things shall wax old and perish, but this shall endure for ever and ever.

But who are the persons for whom this building of God is prepared; or how shall we know whether we belong to that happy number?—This, my brethren, is a most important inquiry, which I propose to make the subject of another discourse.

SERMON LXVIII.

2 COR. v. 1.

For we know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of GOD, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.

IN the first part of this verse, the Apostle compares the body to an earthly house, yea, to a tabernacle or tent, which is still less durable, and more easily taken down; and therefore the dissolution of such a frail thing ought not to be reckoned a very great calamity. To this he opposes the glorious object of the Christian hope, which he calls “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” At the same time expresses the firm persuasion which he had, in common with all true Christians, of being admitted into that glorious and permanent habitation, as soon as the earthly tabernacle should be dissolved. “We know.” He does not say we think, or we hope so, but we are assured of it; we are firmly persuaded that this shall be our lot, as if we were already entered upon the possession of it. In handling this important branch of the subject, I propose, through divine aid,

I. To describe the persons for whom this building of God is prepared.

II. To inquire how, or by what means they come to know that they shall certainly possess it.

And then direct you to the practical improvement of the whole.

THE Psalmist proposes a question in the 24th Psalm, which you must all be sensible deserves our most serious attention. “Who shall ascend into the hill of God, and who shall stand in his holy place?” This is the question which I am now going to answer; and as God enables me, I shall follow the light of his own word, and bring in nothing as a mark of the heirs of glory, but what is clearly expressed in the Scriptures of truth, that infallible rule by which we must all be judged at last.

1st then, We are taught that this building of God, this house in the heavens, is prepared for believers in Christ Jesus, and for them only, exclusive of all others. “This is the will of him that sent me,” says our blessed Lord, (John vi. 40.) “that every one that seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day. He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” It is faith which unites us to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the beir of all things; for, “to as many as receive him, to them gives he power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name;”—and if once we are made sons, then are we likewise heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, and may confidently expect that inheritance which he hath purchased. By nature we are all children of wrath, and can look for nothing but judgment and fiery indignation, to devour us as adversaries; but immediately upon our believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Mediator between God and man, we pass from death to life, God receives us into favour, adopts us into his family, and invests us with a title to all the privileges of children, of which this is the greatest and the best, that we shall dwell

with him for ever in the building here spoken of, this house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

2dly. Another qualification by which the heirs of glory are distinguished, is this, that they are new creatures, born from above, born again of the Spirit of God. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away, behold all things are become new.” Whereas, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”—“Except a man be born again,” said the faithful and true Witness, “he cannot see the kingdom of God,” (John iii. 3. and verse 5.) “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” None but such as are born anew shall find access into this building of God, when death pulls down these earthly tabernacles. Heaven therefore is styled the inheritance of the saints in light. Nothing that is unclean can enter into that holy place. There must be a thorough change wrought in us before we can be admitted into the presence of God; for the Scriptures are peremptory on this head, that without holiness no man shall see God. Christ must be formed within us, before we can entertain the hope of glory. We only delude ourselves, if we look for happiness till our souls are renewed by the Spirit of God; for flesh and blood can never inherit the kingdom of heaven. A new heart must be given us, a new spirit must be put within us, before we can be fit for the sight and enjoyment of a holy God.

A partial reformation of manners will be of no avail—far less a mere abstinence from some grosser kinds of sin. The very frame and temper of our minds must be altered. Our corruptions must not only be restrained, but mortified. In a word, we must put off the whole old man, as the Apostle beautifully expresses it, “and put on the

new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

3d. None shall dwell in this building of God, this house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, but those who live as pilgrims and strangers upon earth. If we seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God, then, and then only may we hope, that when he who is our life shall appear, we shall likewise appear with him in glory. It is one of the distinguishing characters of the wicked, that they mind earthly things. The children of God, on the other hand, have their conversation in heaven. They look upon that as their home, and view this world merely as a strange country, through which they must necessarily pass, before they can come to their Father's house. This heavenly temper is one of the most substantial evidences that are born from above; for every thing tends to the place of its original. And as it proves their divine birth, so it is likewise a certain pledge of their future glory; for God will never abandon his own offspring:—"If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in us, he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken our mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in us." He will certainly rebuild his own temples, and not suffer them to continue always under the ruins of death. I shall only add, in the

4th place, That a constant readiness to do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith, is another Scripture mark by which the heirs of glory are distinguished. This plainly appears from the account which our Saviour gives us of the process of the last judgment, (Matt. xxv. 34.) "Then shall the King say unto them upon his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from

the foundation of the world ; for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat ; thirsty, and ye gave me drink ; I was a stranger, and ye took me in ; naked, and ye clothed me ; I was sick, and ye visited me ; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." Which he afterwards explains thus : " in as much as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Upon this account, Paul exhorts Timothy, to " charge them that are rich in this world, to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." To the same purpose is that affectionate address of the apostle John, (1 John iii. 18, 19.) " My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue only, but in deed and in truth ; and hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him." Not that any thing done by us can merit a reward at the hand of God ; for after we have done all, we are but unprofitable servants, we have done no more than was our duty ; but these acts of obedience prove the sincerity of our faith and love. They are the genuine fruits of the new nature, and may lawfully be considered as evidences of our union with Christ, " who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." Thus have I laid before you a few distinguishing characters of the heirs of glory. These are the persons for whom God hath prepared this glorious building whereof my text speaks, this house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. And what I have said upon this head, will very much facilitate the

II. INQUIRY proposed, namely, How, or by what means, the saints come to know that they shall certainly possess this glorious inheritance, when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved.

Whatever proves our relation to Christ, at the same time proves our title to all the blessed fruits of his sufferings and death; for all the promises of God are in him, yea and amen. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things.” Whoever, then, can discover in himself those gracious qualifications which I formerly named, has a sufficient warrant to conclude that he is vitally united to the Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently an heir of that kingdom which he hath purchased. Thus Paul says of the primitive Christians, that “they took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance.” They knew it in themselves; by looking inwards, they discovered such traces of the divine image, they felt such a supernatural life begun in their souls, as could be produced by no other agent than the Spirit of God, and might therefore be looked upon as a sure presage of their future glory. You see then how this assurance is commonly obtained. The Scriptures describe the persons who shall infallibly be saved. The Christian compares himself with this unerring rule; and finding that the essential characters agree to him, from thence he concludes the certainty of his own salvation.—He proceeds after this manner: God, who cannot lie, hath said, “He that believeth shall be saved;”—after the most serious and impartial examination, I find reason to conclude that by grace I have been enabled to believe—therefore I am persuaded that I shall be saved.

The first of these propositions is absolutely sure, having the truth and faithfulness of God for its foundation; the second, as it is a judgment or sentence of our own minds, must in its own nature be fallible, and hence it

is that believers have not all of them an equal assurance of their salvation. Though they are all persuaded, that he who believeth shall be saved, yet every one cannot say for himself, I am persuaded that I believe, and therefore I shall be saved. Before a person can say this there must be a farther work of the Spirit of God, even a divine light shining upon our faith and other graces, and making them visible to ourselves. We may derive good ground of hope from a strict and careful examination of our own temper and practice, but cannot arrive at a full assurance, till, as the Apostle expresses it, (Rom. viii. 16.) “ the Spirit himself bear witness with our spirits, that we are the sons of God.” But when this divine Witness concurs with his testimony, irradiating his own workmanship within us, and discovering to our own minds such lineaments of the new creature, as plain evidence that we are born of God, then our assurance is full and complete; and we can joyfully say, with the Apostle in the text, “ We know, that if the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” I now come to the practical improvement of the subject.

And, 1st. I must speak a few words to those who call themselves Deists. I know if you could you would stop our mouths, and bury the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; and yet I shall not cease to seek your good, and say from time to time what I can for your conviction. I seldom read the threatenings of the word, but I think of you with trembling; and I never read the comforts of it, but I think of you with pity. Pray, what assurance have you got of a happy eternity? In what house are you to take up your everlasting abode? Alas, every thing beyond the grave must be dark and fearful to you. You

have no promise to build upon—no Mediator to take hold of—no atonement to plead—no covenant to depend upon. You know that God is just, and you know that you are sinners—thus far you can proceed in your own scheme with certainty; but I defy you to move one step farther upon sure ground. You cannot prove that God is reconcileable, far less can you tell upon what terms he will be reconciled to you; so that your causes of fear are real and certain, whereas your hopes are mere guess-work, having no other foundation than the doubtful conjectures of your own darkened minds. What will you do when you come to die? A Christian can say, “I know that my Redeemer liveth; and because he lives, I shall live also.” But what will you be able to say, who have no Redeemer, no intercessor, into whose hands you can commit your departing spirits? who have nothing in your view but a tribunal of justice, a tribunal from which there is no appeal. Be entreated, my dear friends, to think of this in time. “Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way.” If once his wrath begin to burn, then shall you find that they, and they only, are blessed who put their trust in him. But,

2dly. This comfortable subject doth principally direct me to speak to Christians; and I shall address my exhortation to you in the words of the apostle Peter, “Give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.” That this assurance is attainable you have already heard. Let me then press you, by some motives, to seek after it. Consider how much it is for your present interest. O the joy to be assured of the favour of God! this is heart ease, this is the very rest and sabbath of the soul. How sweet and comfortable will the thoughts of a Saviour be to you, when once you can say, “My beloved is mine, and I am his.” Then will it do thee

good to view his wounds by the eye of faith, and to put, as it were, thy hand into his side, when thou canst call him, with Thomas, my Lord and my God. The holy Scriptures will then have a double relish. With what delight will you turn over this charter of your future inheritance, and ponder that exceeding and eternal weight of glory which you shall one day possess. With what holy boldness may you approach the throne of grace, when you can call God your reconciled Father! What would a despairing sinner, who feels the burden of guilt, and the foretastes of everlasting misery, give for such a privilege, especially in a dying hour. How will this sweeten the difficulties of obedience. It was this that kept the Apostle from fainting, as we read in the close of the preceding chapter. What can quicken us more than to know, that after we have gone through a short life in this world, everlasting happiness shall be our portion in the next? Who would not mend his pace, who is assured that every step brings him nearer to heaven?

What a mighty cordial will this be, under the sharpest afflictions, to consider that God meaneth us no hurt, but, on the contrary, hath pledged his faithfulness, to make them all work together for our good? One who hath eternal life in the eye of his faith and hope, can look through tribulation, and see sunshine at the back of the darkest cloud.

And then, what comfort does it give in the hour of death? How miserable is the soul, that must be turned out of doors shiftless and harbourless, and is not provided of an everlasting habitation, or a better place to go to; but assurance makes the soul to triumph over the grave, and take death cheerfully by the cold hand, and even long to be gone, and to be with Christ. Dark and doubting Christians may indeed shrink back, and be afraid of the exchange; but the assured soul desires to

depart, and needs as much patience to live as other men do to die.—Let us then, my brethren, press after this attainment, and not only seek to be in safety, but to know that we are so. And as it is a gift of God, let us, by humble and importunate prayer, ask it of him who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not. And,

Last of all, Let those who have got this invaluable mercy, improve it for those purposes for which it was bestowed. “I will run the way of thy commandments,” said the Psalmist, “when thou hast enlarged my heart.” Make swift progress in the way of duty, if you desire the continuance of this comfortable privilege. Let it appear to all that your conversation is in heaven. Live above this world, and be daily “adding to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity:”—And then shall an entrance be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

SERMON LXIX.

Preached at the Celebration of the Lord's Supper.

1 JOHN iv. 9.

In this was manifested the love of GOD towards us, because that GOD sent his only begotten SON into the world, that we might live through him.

THE value of different truths, like that of all other objects, is to be estimated by the different degrees of their usefulness and importance. Judging by this rule, there

are none which better deserve our attention, than those which relate to the character of the Supreme Being. If our ideas of him be different from what he really is, it is impossible that we can love him truly, or serve him with acceptance. There may be qualities in the imaginary being which we adore, utterly repugnant with the perfections of the true God; and the mode of worship by which we strive to please him, may of consequence be as absurd as the ideas which we entertain of his character. Various are the means which God hath provided for guiding us to the true knowledge of himself. The heavens declare his glory, and the firmament sheweth his handy-works. The invisible things of him, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen, being perceived by the things which he hath made. His moral perfections may be learned from his general administration of the world, and especially from his conduct towards his rational creatures. Had we capacities sufficient to take a comprehensive view of all his works and ways, such a review would result in a full conviction, that righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne, and that mercy and truth continually go before him. But as we see only a small part of the great system which he is carrying on, and of consequence are liable to mistaken and partial conceptions, he hath been graciously pleased to rest his character on one great fact, which it is impossible to misunderstand. This fact the Apostle places in our view in the passage before us. He is engaged in an argument for his favourite doctrine of universal benevolence. To enforce this doctrine, he reminds his readers of the love and benevolence of God, and of this he can find no other way to express his strong conceptions, than by denominating him love and goodness itself. "Beloved," saith he, at the 7th verse, "let

us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." To prove this, he enters into no refined disquisitions, or abstract reasonings, on the divine nature. These, he knew, were but little adapted to the general apprehensions of mankind. He thinks it sufficient to appeal for a proof of it to that wonderful expedient which God devised for saving lost sinners. "In this," says he, "was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." These words then imply,

I. That the redemption of mankind was an act of the freest and most unmerited grace.

II. That it is a full demonstration of the unbounded love and goodness of God.

As these are truths of the greatest importance, and very properly suited to our meditation at this time, I will lay the evidence of them before you in as clear a manner as I can, and then conclude with an application of the subject.

I. then, THE text implies, that the redemption of mankind was an act of the freest and most unmerited grace. God was under no obligation to provide a Saviour for his fallen creatures. Without any imputation on his justice, he might have left them to eat the fruit of their own doings, and to be filled with their own devices. He stood in no need of our services, nor could he be injured by our rebellion. Our perdition would have made no blank in his works, which his power could not have supplied in one moment. Man was indeed miserable enough to excite compassion; but he was deservedly so, and therefore compassion might have been restrained, and justice have had its course. He had left the station in which

he was placed, insolently thrown off his dependance on his Maker, questioned his veracity, and dared his power. Nothing therefore but sovereign mercy could have interposed for his relief. But to make this point perfectly clear, let it be observed,

1st, That God's designs of mercy could not arise from his thinking the constitution he had made with Adam, as the head and representative of his posterity, severe and unrighteous. It is certain, on the contrary, that had it not been holy, just, and good, God could never have been the author of it; and if it was once righteous, no failure on the part of his creatures could alter its nature. There is no insinuation that God changed his opinion of that transaction, or that he hath ceased to consider man as justly condemned by the first covenant. In fact, the method of our recovery through Jesus Christ, contains a virtual ratification of the sentence by which we were condemned; for it hath appointed the second Adam to be the head of an elect world, that through the merit of his sufferings and death, mercy might be dispensed to the guilty, in a consistency with the rectitude of the divine nature, and the honour of his law.

2dly. God was not moved to provide a Saviour for his creatures, by any sense that his law was too strict in its demands for them to be able to obey. We find that the word of God still denounces a curse on every deviation from that perfect rule.—There is no mitigation of the penalties annexed to disobedience. The law which requires perfect obedience is in full force. The exactions of justice are not in the least abated. How indeed is it possible that they could? for consider how the case stands. God is infinitely amiable and perfect; and what does he require of his creatures, but that they should love him with all the soul, strength, and heart, which

he hath given them? Can this ever cease to be an obligation? What should make it cease? Nothing, but that God should become less amiable, that his perfections should fade, his goodness be exhausted, or his greatness impaired. On the other hand, what is it that he threatens to those who withdraw their hearts from him? Is it not the loss of his favour and friendship? Can either the obligation or penalty be accused of severity? Surely in this God does nothing unbecoming a wise and righteous governor. Nay, with reverence be it said, he could not do otherwise without denying himself. Is it conceivable that he should retract his word, that he should compound, like earthly creditors, for a part of what is owing to him; that he should depreciate the honour of his law, or dispense with the exactions of his justice? No; he hath said, and never will unsay it, “that the wages of sin is death;” but he hath purposed to display his compassion to fallen man, in a manner that should reconcile all his perfections. “And in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that he hath sent his Son into the world, that we might live through him.”

3dly. The inability to perform his duty, which man contracted by his fall, did not render his case in the least more deserving of compassion. This inability, as it proceeds entirely from the depravity of our tempers, and the enmity of our hearts, can only serve to render us more vile and odious in his sight. Had we indeed lost the affection of love altogether, had our natural powers been quite destroyed by the fall, our case might have moved compassion; but this case was not ours. The affection of love still remains, and we exert it with ardour and vivacity towards a variety of objects. Our natural powers, though impaired, are not destroyed,

for we employ them successfully in our worldly concerns; so that our inability to love God, when translated in its true language, amounts just to this, that we love those things which are contrary to his nature so much, that it is impossible we can love him; and how this should extenuate our guilt, let those who plead it explain.

4thly. God was not moved to this act of unmerited grace by any foreknowledge he had that mankind would receive it with thankfulness. He foresaw, as appears by the prophetic writings, the ingratitude and contempt that would be poured upon his Son. He foresaw that he should be despised and rejected of men; that his person should be insulted, his name derided, his blood shed, and the calls of his grace rejected. All this was full in his eye when he laid the plan of our redemption; so that in all views, you see it was an act of the freest and most unmerited grace. It took its rise from no good in the creature, either existing or foreseen. Unmerited, unsolicited, and ill requited, the fountain of all this grace was in God himself; for his goodness is like himself, unsearchable. "His thoughts are not our thoughts, neither his ways our ways." I now proceed, in the

II. place, To show that the redemption of mankind is a full demonstration of the unbounded love and goodness of the Divine nature. "In this," saith the Apostle, "was the love of God manifested towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." Consider then,

1st, The dignity of the person whom God sent on this gracious errand. Had he sent one of the meanest of his servants to sympathize with us in our forlorn state, it would have been an act of great condescension and goodness. Had he commissioned one of the least considerable of those spirits who surround his throne, to mi-

nister some relief to us in our miserable situation, with what gratitude ought we to have received such an instance of his compassionate regard. But who is this that cometh in the name of the Lord to save us? What are his rank, his titles, and dignity? Let a prophet declare: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace."—Let an evangelist declare: "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."—Let an apostle declare: "God who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake to our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son from heaven—who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." Or if all these testimonies are insufficient, let it be declared by a voice from the excellent Majesty, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." Such was the person whom God sent to save us. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son."—But whither did he send this divine person? This is a

2d Circumstance that cannot fail to heighten our gratitude. He sent him into this lower world. He came from heaven to earth, from the throne to the footstool, from the bosom of his Father to this guilty and polluted world, which deserved to be visited with an executioner of justice, instead of an herald of peace. And in what circumstances did he appear on earth? Was it in the pomp of royalty, to receive the homage and services of his creatures? No; his life on earth was one continued scene of suffering. From his birth to his death he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He was even so des-

titute of the common accommodations of life, that he said of himself "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." Yet these sufferings, though great, were light in comparison with what he afterwards underwent. The bitterest sorrows which the common lot of humanity knows, admit some intervals of ease and relief. At worst, the mind of man, in its most oppressed moments, anticipates the bright side of things; or, ignorant of futurity, feels but the weight of the present moment. But this consolation of human weakness, the prophetic mind of Jesus did not admit. He foresaw the approaching hour of suffering, and was fully aware of every bitter ingredient in the cup that was prepared for him to drink. He beheld the louring cloud of darkness and distress. He knew the malice of his enemies, the perfidy of his betrayer, and the unfaithfulness of his friends. He saw the accursed tree, the torturing scourge, the piercing nails, the hour and the power of darkness.

Behold him in that unutterable conflict, which wrung from him those complaining accents, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Behold him at his Father's footstool, offering up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him. Behold him going forth to meet his enemies; receiving the treacherous kiss; stretching forth his hands to the shackles; forsaken of all his friends; buffeted, scourged, and spit upon; at last nailed to a cross, and insulted, even in his expiring moments, with a derision of his wo. When you have beheld this complicated scene of anguish, say if there was ever sorrow like unto this sorrow; and yet far beyond all this must have been those mysterious feelings of the Son of God, when he cried out "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Such was the treatment which the Son of God met with on earth, and which he was prepared to meet with for our sakes; and can we doubt, after this, of the love of God in sending him into the world? "Greater love than this hath no man, that a man lay down his life for his friend; but herein God commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Consider, in the

3d place, The gracious design on which he came into the world. It was, "that we might live through him." Life, you know, is the most important of blessings, and the foundation of all other enjoyments. To purchase life, we reckon no expense or loss too great. "Skin for skin, all that a man hath will he give for his life." But life, in Scripture language, is generally used to signify happiness in general, and in this sense it is to be understood in the text. It is here opposed to all that misery which we had brought upon ourselves by our apostacy from God. By nature we are dead in law, lying under a sentence of condemnation, the execution of which is only suspended by the brittle thread of life. We are also spiritually dead, alienated from the fountain of life and happiness, dead in trespasses and sins. To complete our miserable situation, we are liable to the second death, that awful death which subjects both soul and body to everlasting punishment in the world to come. Now, the death of Christ delivers us from all these evils. By him all who believe on his name are freed from condemnation, and obtain a right to live: "For Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." Through him we also are made spiritually alive. "You hath he quickened," saith St. Paul to the Ephesians, "who were dead in trespasses and sins.—The old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin

might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." To crown all, through him we have the gift of eternal life, being begotten again unto the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

And is there now aught wanting to demonstrate the unbounded love and goodness of God? How warmly does Hezekiah speak! with what gratitude does he express himself on a few years being added to his natural life!—"The living, the living, they shall praise thee, as I do this day. The fathers to the children shall declare thy truth. Upon a stringed instrument will I praise thee, and upon the harp with a solemn sound." What then ought to be our feelings of gratitude! what ought to be our language of praise, to whom God hath granted length of days for evermore!

I have thus endeavoured to show you that the redemption of mankind is an act of the freest grace; and that it is a full demonstration of the unbounded love and goodness of God.

FROM what hath been said, the first and most obvious inference is, our obligation to love that God who hath thus loved us. And is he not worthy of this affection in himself? Has the perfection of beauty and goodness no charms to move us, while with so much ardour we run after the faint traces of these qualities in creation? Especially what are our hearts made of, if they can resist the impression of a benefit so inestimable as I have been describing, conferred with a bounty that even prevented our requests. We value ourselves, we esteem others, for their grateful and affectionate feelings. We can hardly entertain any regard for a character in which we see no marks of sensibility. Shall this defect then, excite our disapprobation in all cases, excepting in that where it is

most glaring and odious? Shall we exert our affections with ardour on many inferior objects, and reserve none for him whose power made us, and whose goodness has made us happy? You excuse yourselves, perhaps, by saying, that your affections are engaged to your friends and benefactors, because they are objects of perception, and you have seen and conversed with them; whereas God is unseen and spiritual, so that your feelings with regard to him cannot be so lively. Is nothing then an object of your affections but what you have seen with your bodily eyes? Is it only the outward form of your friend that you love? Is it only the hand that confers the benefit, or the feet that move to serve you? Is it not rather the soul, the heart of your friend, that engages your love? even that kindness which never fails, that sincerity which you can always trust, that faithfulness on which you can at all times depend, that sympathy which makes your griefs and joys his own? Do you cease to love your friend after his body is laid in the dust? Sure I am, none who ever knew a friend will say so.

It is then the soul that engages affection—And is not the soul visible? Are you not as certain of the existence of God as you are of your own soul's existence, or the souls of those you converse with? True it is, that God is not to be discerned by our senses; but is he then afar off? Doth he not fill heaven and earth with his presence? Do not kindness, faithfulness, and sympathy, belong to his character, more than to any earthly friend? Who is it that hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?" Who is it that hath said, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me?" Who is it that hath desired us to cast all our care upon him, because he careth for us? Who is it that hath said, "He that toucheth you, toucheth

the apple of mine eye?" Say not, then, I cannot love God, because I have not seen him; say rather, if thou hast the heart to say so, I cannot love God, because that love is already engaged to his rival. I love the world too much, I love my sins too much, *i. e.* I love his enemies too much to have any remaining affections to bestow on him. In the

2^d place, We may infer from what hath been said, if God so loved us while we were enemies, how much more will he love us, now that we are reconciled to him by the death of his Son? There are but few points on which I am sanguine enough to think I could argue to the conviction of a person disposed to evade the force of evidence; yet if there is any, I think it is in proof of this sentiment of the Apostle, "He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up to the death for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." Allow me that God has sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might have life through him; and then say, is there another favour so costly that you should think it beyond the reach of his benevolence? You may perhaps say, that he hath already done so much, that you cannot conceive how he should do more. But I will ask you this, Why did he confer the first favour? Was it only to save appearances to his creatures? Do you conceive of it as of that constrained kind of benevolence which we sometimes see in the world—a man paying the debts of another, and then setting him adrift to do as he best can in the world? No; I will tell you what it rather resembles, if a resemblance to it can be found in this selfish world. It resembles a man taking up a helpless orphan. He at first clothes and feeds him; by and by, he conceives an attachment for him. Having done so much, he is unwilling to leave his work imper-

fect; he makes him worthy of his care, by instilling good principles into him. In time he adopts him into his family; at last he makes him his heir, and leaves him all he has. Whoever knows the human heart, knows that this is the natural progress of affection. He that gives, cherisheth his own benevolence by the gift; and to have conferred one favour, is a reason for continuing and adding others. I say not this, as if God's thoughts were to be measured by ours. I have a better warrant for using this comparison—"being confident," as an apostle has expressed it, "of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.—Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God—and if sons, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.—God commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.—Much more, then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him: for if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

But here, my brethren, I find the subject rising and widening beyond the reach of my thoughts, or feeble illustrations. "How great, O God, is that goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee, before the sons of men!"

One other inference from what hath been said we cannot omit, being the inference of the Apostle himself in the context. "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." I will not inquire whether this is an exhortation to universal benevolence, or an exhortation to Christians to love their brethren; certain it is, that

the disciples of Christ are exhorted to both of these amiable dispositions. Of whom are we bold enough to say, that he may not be one of those for whom Christ died; that he may not become, through grace, one of the excellent ones of the earth? If thou art a vessel of mercy, consider who it was that filled thee; and may not the same fountain fill him—fill any of the race of Adam? Let your benevolence then extend to the whole of mankind: but let your love be special towards the household of faith. Love them for the image they bear—love them for the ties by which you are connected together. Let your love to them be fervent and active. Impart to them every assistance of friendship, especially of that friendship which regards the interests of their souls. Exhort one another daily, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Continue together in one accord, in prayer and supplication, forwarding one another in your way to Zion, and singing songs of comfort as you go along.

On the whole, you see how much the religion of Christ applies itself to the best affections of the human heart. To whom does it direct our worship?—To the God of love, the God who is love, and who manifested his love to us, in that he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. What doth it require of us, but that we should love him who first loved us; that we should yield ourselves to be his, and trust in him for all good things. Are ye willing? The pledges of the covenant are at hand, and may God seal them to your souls. *Amen.*

SERMON LXX.

Preached after the Celebration of the Lord's Supper.

ACTS viii. 39.

— *and he went on his way rejoicing.*

THE person of whom this account is given was a man of Ethiopia, who possessed a place of great trust and authority under the queen of that country. It appears from the history, that he was a proselyte to the Jewish religion; for he had come as far as Jerusalem to attend on the worship of the God of Israel. The manner of his conversion to Christianity, by the ministry of Philip the Evangelist, is circumstantially related in the preceding verses; and as there are several striking incidents in this passage of history, I shall point out a few of them which are chiefly remarkable.

1st. We are told, that when this officer of the Ethiopian queen was about to take his departure from Jerusalem, God sent his angel to Philip at Samaria, with a peremptory order to leave that place, and to travel southward till he should come upon the road that goeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza; which place he had no sooner reached, than lo, the illustrious stranger appears in his chariot, pursuing his journey to his own country.

2dly. It deserves our notice, that at the precise moment when Philip, by a divine impulse, ran to meet him, this devout proselyte was reading aloud a part of Isaiah's prophecy, which speaks plainly and directly concerning the Messiah. The place of Scripture which

he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: In his humiliation his judgment was taken away, and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth." Upon hearing these words, Philip accosted him with this question, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The other ingenuously confessed that he did not; and having, with uncommon courtesy, taken the Evangelist up into his chariot, begged to be informed who the person was whom the prophet had in his eye. "Then," as we read in the 35th verse, "Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus."

Thus both the preacher and his subject were very remarkably ordered in the providence of God; and, as might be expected from such favourable presages, the discourse was accompanied with the powerful influences of his grace: For upon their coming to a certain place where there was water, the new disciple, of his own accord, modestly signified his desire to be baptized; and after professing his faith in Christ, in these few but solemn words, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God,"—the chariot was stopt, and Philip went down with him into the water and baptized him. A

3d Incident, no less remarkable than the former two, is recorded in the verse where my text lies. "When they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the Eunuch saw him no more." How admirable, how perfect are the works of God! These two were brought together by the agency of an angel, and now they are parted asunder by a miracle, but a miracle of wisdom as well as of power. For this sudden and supernatural removal of the preacher, was a powerful confirmation of the doctrine which

he taught, and had an obvious tendency to impress on the mind of the new convert this important truth, that although a man had been employed as the instrument of his conversion, yet the work itself was truly divine, and the glory of it due to God alone.

Accordingly we learn, from the latter part of the verse, that all these wonderful events had a most happy influence on his mind. He was transported with what he had seen, and heard, and experienced; his judgment approved the wise choice he had made, and he went on his way rejoicing. He went on his way, *i. e.* he proceeded on his journey homeward. The new persuasion he had received into his mind did not mislead him into fanciful plans of action, inconsistent with, or perhaps opposite to, the duties of his station. No, he knew that the religion he had embraced, instead of releasing him from these duties, rather bound him to a more faithful and diligent performance of them. He therefore went on his way, and he rejoiced as he went. He felt his soul enriched with heavenly grace. He had now got a treasure which he could properly call his own, even that pearl of great price, with which all the treasures of Ethiopia were not worthy to be compared.

Your condition, my brethren, is in several respects similar to the condition of this man. He had solemnly avouched the Lord to be his God: You, with equal solemnity, have this day done the same. He had just received one seal of the covenant of grace: You, this day, have received the other. He had a long journey before him: Ye also are travellers through this wilderness, toward the promised land of rest. In these circumstances I think that, without apology, I may take occasion, from the words that have been read, to address you with a twofold exhortation:

I. To go on your way heavenward. And,

II. To rejoice as you go.

I TRUST I need hardly inform you, that the spiritual repast to which you have been this day admitted, is purely intended to strengthen you in your journey to the heavenly country. God sends us these grapes from the Canaan above, not to detain us in the wilderness, but to allure us out of it, and to make us hasten our steps towards that country of which they are the natural and spontaneous product. My first exhortation, therefore, is both seasonable and necessary—Arise and go forward. Many who mistake the nature of this ordinance, are very anxious and busy for a few days, in making a sort of formal preparation for it. Then their countenances are demure, and their steps are solemn, and their conversation is precise, and their attendance upon the most protracted services of devotion indefatigable; and this they call religion, and trust in its merit to absolve them from all the dishonest, worldly, uncharitable, and ungodly practices, of which they are guilty in the other periods of their time. But I trust, my brethren, that ye have not so learned Christ, and I trust that we, who are your spiritual guides, shall never encourage you in so fatal a delusion. I address you now, as the disciples and friends of Christ. I speak to you in his name; and that his authority may be the more unquestionable in the exhortation I am to give you, I shall deliver it in the very words which his own spirit hath employed. “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” And beware of a sinful conformity to this world, “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of

God.—As ye have this day received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him,” in a manner suitable to the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.—Add to your faith, virtue ; and to virtue, knowledge ; and to knowledge, temperance ; and to temperance, patience ; and to patience, godliness ; and to godliness, brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness, charity.” ‘Think not that ye “have already attained ; but this one thing do ye, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.—And I beseech you, brethren, that every one of you do shew the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end ; that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience do now inherit the promises.—Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.—And let your path resemble that of the just—a shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.—Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil—having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word

of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."

These few passages of Scripture, which speak to us directly as *soldiers* and *travellers*, who, under the conduct and tuition of the great Captain of Salvation, must force their way to the Zion above, fully express the meaning of my first exhortation; and as they are not my words, but the words of the living and true God, the divine authority with which they are marked, must necessarily imply our obligation to obey them, and consequently give a greater weight to my present address than any arguments that I could possibly devise. Let me therefore once more repeat the exhortation, and call upon you to make progress in your Christian course. Let your present attainments, instead of satisfying you, only incite your zeal and ambition to rise still higher in the excellencies of the divine life. Carry ever in your minds, that the design of the solemn and instrumental duties of religion is to beget and strengthen those principles and habits of goodness in your souls, by which they will be gradually ripened for the life of heaven. Stir up your faith to behold him who is invisible, that you may walk before him in the light of the living, having no other anxiety but to do what he commands; no other ambition but to enjoy his favour now, and to receive his approbation at last. Let your meditation on those sufferings of the Redeemer, which ye have been shewing forth to-day, instruct you what you are to expect in the present life, and how you ought to behave under all its trials and afflictions. Do not flatter yourselves with the prospect of uninterrupted ease, and unclouded enjoyment; but consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, when at any time ye are wea-

ry or faint in your minds; and study to know him in the power of his resurrection, and in the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death. Exercise yourselves daily in mortifying the deeds of the body; in crucifying the flesh, with its affections and lusts; and in opposing your inclinations as often as they oppose your duty. Thus labouring to be examples of patience, meekness, contentment, and to come behind in no good thing to which you are called; go on in the strength of the Lord, making mention of his righteousness, even of his only: "And may the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Having thus exhorted you to continue your progress in the good ways of God, let me now exhort you, in the II. place, To rejoice as you go on.

After all the comfortable topics that have been suggested to your meditation in the solemn service in which we have been engaged, it should be almost unnecessary to recall to your minds any of those copious sources of joy which belong to the redeemed of the Lord. Yet lest there should be some mind so dark, some apprehension so slow, as to be at a loss in discovering its own comforts; I will mention in their order, a few of those that are most obvious and solid, and best fitted to fill the mind with peace and joy in believing. In the

1st place, then, If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious, (and to those only who have had this experience do I speak) then rejoice that ye have passed from death to life, and that there is now no condemnation for

them who are in Christ Jesus. Rejoice in that distinguishing grace which hath plucked you as brands from the burning, which hath brought up your soul from the grave, which hath kept you alive, that ye should not go down into the pit. Look around among your fellow-creatures, and behold the multitudes who walk in the broad way that leadeth to destruction, who go on headstrong and blindfold in the paths of folly, until their eyes are opened in the everlasting burnings. Then consider your own better choice and safer condition, and rejoice in that mercy which found you, when you were wandering from peace and happiness, which arrested you in your mad career, and brought you back to the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. In the

2d place, Rejoice that you have not only passed from death to life, but are also advanced to the dearest and most intimate relation to all the Persons of the ever blessed Godhead. By your new birth, ye are become the sons of God, members of Christ, and temples for the Holy Ghost. And what an overflowing source of consolation is this? Can there be any cause of fear or inquietude to those who dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty? Can *they* want any good thing, of whom God hath taken the charge as his peculiar property, and for whom he provides as for his own? Is not his wisdom sufficient to guide you through all the perplexing paths of life? Is not his power sufficient to support you under every danger and difficulty? Is not his goodness sufficient to bestow on you all things richly to enjoy? In what shape, then, can any real evil assail you; or what imperfection can there be in your prospects of felicity? In the

3d place, Rejoice that God hath made with you an everlasting covenant, well ordered in all things and

sure. He hath not only assured you, in general, of his good will and gracious purposes on your behalf; but hath also given you a variety of exceeding great and precious promises, so that there can be no possible exigence in your situation, in which you may not find a suitable and abundant relief, in these gracious assurances of a faithful God.

Were I to descend to particulars, it would be necessary for me to repeat the greater part of this sacred book, every page of which contains some reviving declaration of what God hath already done, or promised to do for his people. And “the words of God are pure words, like silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. He is the rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are judgment; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.” Have not those, then, good cause to rejoice, who have such an ample charter put into their hands by the King of kings, a charter investing them with a full and unalterable right to every necessary blessing, even to all the unsearchable riches of Christ. In the

4th place, Rejoice that the life which is begun in you is an immortal principle that can never be extinguished. Ye are born again by the Spirit of God; and ye are kept by his mighty power, through faith unto salvation. United as you are to Christ, by a living faith, ye can never perish. His charge to preserve you, is as strict and binding as his charge to redeem and renew you at first. Ye were given unto him from eternity by his heavenly Father, and will he not keep those whom the Father hath committed to him? Hear his own words: “All that the Father hath given me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out.” Christ formed in the heart of a true believer, resembles, in

some measure, Christ incarnate in the world. The divine nature may be obscured for a season; it may, and probably will, have its season of humiliation: but though it may seem to die, yet it shall have its resurrection likewise, and afterwards its ascension into glory. - This it was that enabled Paul to say, "I therefore run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air." Perseverance is not only the duty, but the privilege also of all who set themselves in good earnest to travel for heaven. And though the law of God obliges them, and their new nature inclines them, to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, yet they have a far better security for their success than any efforts of their own. Omnipotence is their guardian; "the eternal God is their refuge, and underneath them his everlasting arms."

My brethren, time and strength would fail me, were I to attempt enumerating all the sources of joy which belong to the redeemed of the Lord. I trust, that in your own frequent meditation you revolve them, and that in your frequent addresses to the throne of grace, you commemorate them with thankful hearts before the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you not then express the joy and gratitude of your souls, for the benefit of your Redeemer's example, for the promised aids of his Spirit, for the assurance of his intercession, for the gracious appointment of him as the Judge of the world, for the access you now have by him to the throne of grace, for the means of communion with the Father of your spirits, and the pleasing fellowship of those who are travelling with you in the same road to the Zion above. Leaving these, then, to be revolved in your own minds, I will now only exhort you, in the

5th and last place, To rejoice in the hope of the glory

of God. "Fear not, little flock," said the blessed Jesus, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Ere long your trials and sufferings shall come to an end, and your light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall be followed by an exceeding great and eternal weight of glory. At present we come from scenes of anxiety and vexation to keep our solemn feasts; and our wedding garments are stained with the pollution, or torn with the briars through which we travel. Even amidst our most sublime delights, we are conscious of a certain blank in our feelings, which reminds us that this is not our rest; but in the presence of God there is fulness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. The poor afflicted broken spirit, which now breathes in trouble as in its daily air, and scarcely knows any other rule for computing the periods of time, than by the revolutions of sorrows and disappointments, shall then be tuned to the high praises of God; and its love to him, who is the Lord of love, shall feel no bounds, and fear no end. O how the unveiled glory of God will then brighten many a face which is now darkened with grief, and stained with tears, and daily wears the hue of melancholy!—There is not a sorrowful countenance in all the courts of Zion's King; their doubts and fears have dropt off with the veil of mortality, and sorrow and sighing have fled far away. Lift up your heads, then, ye that travel towards the heavenly Zion, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. It is not more certain that the sun doth shine in the firmament, than that ye shall live for ever in the heavenly Jerusalem, and join in the innumerable company about the throne, in the everlasting praise of your God and Redeemer. Then shall you understand the happiness of believers, and know better than I can tell you, what

God did for your souls, when he called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

Rejoice then in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice. Let it appear, by the serenity of your countenance, and the alacrity of your steps, that your salvation is already begun, and that though the fulness of your joys be reserved for another world, yet even in this you can remark, with a satisfaction unknown to the mere sons of earth, how sweet is the face of nature, how delicious are the fruits of the field. "Go your way, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God now accepteth your work." *Amen.*

SERMON LXXI.

HEBREWS v. 12.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

THE Apostle having, at the 10th verse, compared, in general terms, the priesthood of Jesus with that of Melchisedek, finds himself obliged to break off the argument, not from any defect of his own knowledge, but from the dulness of those to whom he wrote. Their minds were not as yet prepared for such sublime instruction, and that not owing to any natural infirmity, but merely to their neglect or misimprovement of the best advantages. "For when for the time ye ought to

be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." Accordingly, he tells them very plainly, how disgracefully deficient they were in the improvement which might have been expected, from the time that they had been in the school of Christ. Instead of being in a capacity of teaching others, they were themselves in the lowest class of learners. Instead of making progress in the knowledge of divine truth, they had forgotten what they once possessed. Instead of growing to the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus, they had shrunk again to the condition of babes, whose weak and tender organs must be nourished with the simplest food. Instead of expanding with a regular and solid growth, opening and enlarging, their faculties, through disuse, had become so contracted as to refuse admittance to the plainest truths, much more to doctrines so deep and involved as those which he had begun to state. Such is the spirit of the Apostle's reproof contained in the text: "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."

The case of the Hebrews, as represented in these words, is by no means singular. The neglect, at least the slow improvement of the means of knowledge, has not ceased to be a reproach in these latter days. Although blessed with the most abundant means of becoming wise unto salvation, how trifling are our attainments, how ill arranged are our religious ideas, how little established are we in the faith, and how ill qualified to give a good reason of the hope that is in us! Amidst all these infirmities, how disdainful are we often of common truths!

how desirous to be gratified with novel speculations! how fantastical in our taste for religious instruction! I hope I may be allowed to offer some observations on these topics, without being supposed to aim at any peculiar censure, my sole design being to stir you up to further improvements, even to aspire to the wisdom of the perfect, and of those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The text naturally gives rise to the three following observations:

I. That all who are favoured with the light of the gospel, shall be utterly inexcusable, if their improvements in knowledge do not bear a proportion to the time they have continued to enjoy it.

II. That those who are not careful to add to their knowledge, will be in great danger of losing what they have formerly acquired.

III. That without a proper acquaintance with the first plain principles of religion, men are unfit to receive doctrines of a higher and more speculative nature.

These observations I will confirm by some reasoning, and then make a practical application of the subject. The

I. observation was, That all who are favoured with the light of the gospel, shall be utterly inexcusable, if their improvements in knowledge do not bear a proportion to the time they have continued to enjoy it.

This is one of those propositions which neither needs, nor will admit of much positive proof. There cannot be a plainer dictate of common sense, than what our Saviour hath taught us in these words: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him the more shall be required." Every advantage bestowed on us by Providence is a trust, of which we must give an account hereafter. The

advantages which tend to our improvement in heavenly wisdom, are a trust of the most important kind; and therefore the guilt of neglecting or abusing these must be of the deepest nature. But let us hear what may be said in opposition to this. Every objection that can be stated may be resolved into one or other of these two—either that Christianity is not worthy of our study; or that, from its incomprehensible nature, it is impossible to make any considerable progress in the knowledge of it. To maintain the first of these, is in fact to deny the divinity of our holy religion; for certainly a revelation proceeding from infinite wisdom, with this merciful intention, to direct wandering sinners to everlasting and unspeakable felicity, must be allowed to deserve all the time and attention we can possibly bestow on it. As to the second objection, relating to the mysterious nature of Christianity, it must partly be admitted, but in no sense that will apply to the point in question. There are indeed doctrines taught in it far surpassing the extent of our understandings, which must be received with the obedience of faith, resting on this solid principle of reason, that they are revealed by him who cannot lie. But though there are deep and inscrutable mysteries in Christianity, it is far from being mysterious in all its parts. Its discoveries of the moral character of God, and of his gracious purposes toward the human race; its precepts, promises, and sanctions; and its general influence upon human conduct, present the noblest and most improving subject of contemplation, in which the faculties of man can be engaged. In these a well formed mind will taste a pleasure and satisfaction far beyond what all the treasures of science and philosophy can bestow. It is true, that even in this study, certain difficulties will at first be experienced; but shall it form an ob-

jection to the pursuit of heavenly wisdom, that it bears an analogy to every improvement of which the human mind is susceptible? Where is the valuable advantage that is to be acquired without patience, method, and application? Shall we expect to become masters of religious truth, with less diligence and application than we bestow on the most trifling science, or the meanest mechanic art? I mean not that it is either necessary or possible for every private Christian to attain a thorough knowledge of theology. The leisure and the capacities of men are so different, that an equal progress in divine knowledge cannot be supposed in every individual. This much, however, may be reasonably required and expected, that persons soliciting the outward privileges of religion, should know the great truths to which these privileges refer—should be able to tell what benefit they expect from them—should be able to shew some fruit of all the instructions they receive. Yet how often is even this moderate expectation disappointed? How many are there to be found in this land of gospel light, almost as ignorant of Jesus and his religion, as those who never heard his name? How deep must be their shame, how heavy their condemnation, when at last it shall appear in what manner their time has been employed? This will stop the mouths of all ignorant Christians, and expose their vain apologies, when their consciences, awakened by the dawn of an everlasting day, shall reproach them with the hours, days, and months, in which they fatigued themselves with vice and folly, instead of studying how to become wise unto salvation. The

II. observation from the text was, That those who are not careful to add to their knowledge, are in danger of losing what they have already acquired.

This was the very case of the Hebrews. They had

not been at due pains to increase their knowledge, in consequence of which neglect, they were even decayed in their former attainments. “Ye are *become* such,” says the Apostle, “as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.” He does not say, *Ye are* still in the condition of babes; but ye are returned or shrunk back again to that condition, thereby plainly intimating that there had been a time when the case was otherwise with them.

And as this proposition is well founded in the text, so it is sufficiently supported both by reason and experience. Our own observation, if we have not been extremely inattentive, cannot fail to furnish us with instances similar to what is here recorded. The truth is, a comprehensive knowledge of the whole, in all its connexions, is the only security for the distinct knowledge, or remembrance of any one part. Nothing is so difficult as to retain the rudiments of any science, unless we pursue them to their proper use, and discover their subserviency to the general scheme to which they belong.

Let a man be introduced to the view of a complete piece of machinery, without being acquainted with the general purpose it is intended to accomplish; let him survey every part of it with the most minute attention, and labour to imprint the idea of each as deeply as possible in his mind; yet if he fall short of comprehending the intention of the whole, all that he has seen will be equally useless to himself and to mankind. His observations, unconnected with any leading principle, will float without method or application in his mind; or if they have any effect, it will be only to make him rash and petulant in hazarding opinions on a subject which he imperfectly understands.

Our pursuit of religious knowledge, under the disad-

vantages of our present dark and degenerate state, may be compared to a person swimming against the current, who has no other way to maintain his advantage but by pressing forward. Our faculties, by disuse, contract a rust, a disability either for discerning or pursuing those things that are excellent. Hence the Apostle says, at the 14th verse, “ Strong meat is for those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil;” thereby intimating, that the mind must be kept in constant exercise, otherwise we may lose the faculty of distinguishing between things the most widely different. But this is not all: A person who stops short in his pursuit of religious truth, plainly discovers that he has lost that relish which alone imprints it in deep and lasting characters on the mind. It is well known how slowly we imbibe, and how quickly we forget, those parts of learning which we study with reluctance. No man will be careful to preserve a matter about which he is become indifferent, especially if this cannot be done without much labour and attention. Accordingly, it is never supposed in Scripture, that we should remit our application to make farther progress, through a lazy satisfaction with our present attainments. No saint ever set such an example of indolent self-contentment. “ I count all things but loss,” said the apostle Paul, “ for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means

I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead: not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The

III. and last observation from the text was, That without a proper acquaintance with the plain principles of religion, men are utterly unfit for receiving doctrines of a higher and more speculative nature.

This is the precise argument of the text, and needs only to be mentioned to force our assent. It is saying nothing more strange, than that a person, in order to be able to read, must first know letters; a proposition so plain and obvious, that it would be ridiculous to attempt a formal proof of it. The operations of grace, as well as those of nature, are, for the most part, gradual. Miraculous gifts indeed have been enjoyed, and miraculous progress hath been made in divine knowledge, beyond what the common use of means could have produced; but these have been rare instances for special purposes in Providence, and are by no means to be expected in the common course of things. If, therefore, we aspire to eminent knowledge in religion, we must begin by cultivating distinct apprehensions of its first principles. Nothing has been of more prejudice to Christianity, than the premature indigested reasonings of novices, about its more speculative doctrines, before they have been well established in its great and fundamental articles. Hence have arisen all those odious names with which particular sects have stigmatized one another,

while, in contending for the name of disciples, they have thrown away that badge of charity by which the true disciples of Christ are most effectually distinguished.

Justly, then, does the Apostle say, that strong meat belongeth only to them who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern between good and evil. The metaphor is highly proper and significant; for as strong meat, administered to a weak stomach, contributes only to increase its infirmity; in like manner the more difficult doctrines of Christianity, meeting with weak presumptuous understandings, have no other effect than to swell the natural vanity of the heart, which afterwards vents itself in words and behaviour, equally dishonourable to God and offensive to man.

Having thus endeavoured to confirm the observations which naturally arise from the text, it remains only to make a practical application of the subject.

IN this application, the hearers of the gospel seem to have the first and principal concern. Ye have enjoyed this advantage from your earliest years. For the time, ye might have been teachers of others. Let us suppose that ye had attended as punctually upon instruction in any other science, would you not be ashamed, after ten or twenty years, to own you were as ignorant as the first month, and much more ashamed to have it thought that you were contented to be so? Let me ask how you would tolerate such carelessness and insensibility in your children, whom you educate at a great expense for the purposes of this world? Yet how do the cases differ? Much indeed in one respect; for a man may be happy without human learning, but without the knowledge of religion, you must be miserable for ever, and so much the more miserable for the neglect of the opportunities which you have enjoyed. Let me beseech you to

bring this home to your minds. In all other subjects, you desire to be well informed. You would not prostitute your time to a ceremonial attendance of any other kind, without some solid and useful object. You would not give up four hours in every week, merely to hear words, without intending to derive some instruction from them. "Take heed then how ye hear." Be assured we do not speak in vain. Our defects indeed are many: we do not preach nor live as we ought to do—may God pardon and amend us; but we dispense the ordinances of God; and his word, though dispensed by weak unskilful hands, shall not return void, but shall accomplish the thing whereunto he sent it: it shall either be the saviour of life unto life, or of death unto death to your souls.

Again, ye have heard that they who are not careful to add to their knowledge are in danger of losing what they had formerly acquired. Beware then of resting satisfied with your present attainments, but follow on to know the Lord. Be assiduous to improve the advantages ye possess, for growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, that ye may walk worthy of God unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God—Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power; continuing in the faith, grounded and settled, and not moved from the hope of the gospel which ye have heard.

Once more, Ye have heard that, without a proper acquaintance with the plain principles of religion, men are unfit to receive doctrines of a higher and more speculative nature. Expect not, then, that we should study your amusement at the expense of your edification. There are persons, perhaps, who expect us to discuss some nice points in casuistry, or to clear up some controverted

points in divinity; in short, who would take it kindly, if, dropping the common topics which have been long and much worn in the service of religion, we provided some fresh ones always for their entertainment. This may be very proper in its season, and, so far as it is fit, a faithful minister of Christ will not be wanting to their expectation; for he has gathered nothing in all the stores of divine knowledge of which he is not willing that they should partake. But in common, this indulgence is entirely out of place. The plainest and most practical truths are first of all to be inculcated. Many more stand in need of these than of novelties in speculation; and even of those who call out for such, many make the demand with a very bad grace. They might be amused, perhaps, with a curious discussion; but what if their sense of divine things be dead? What if they need to have their minds stimulated, and their consciences alarmed with the terrors of God's word? When our Lord was asked by a curious inquirer, if there were few that should be saved? instead of answering directly to the question, he addressed the person with a practical exhortation, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." If any of a similar character should attend our assemblies, let them not think it strange if we imitate so high an example, by preferring to impart to them the plainest and simplest, because the most necessary truths; especially as it cannot be doubted that the Apostle's reproof in the text is still applicable to many hearers of the gospel:—"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." *Amen.*

SERMON LXXII.

2 Cor. vi. 1.

We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

NOTHING can be conceived more encouraging to creatures, in our feeble and depraved situation, than those views of the Supreme Being disclosed by the Apostle in the concluding part of the former chapter. There God is represented in the characters of condescension and grace, so perfectly suited to our necessities and guilty condition, as must render him the object of our supreme love and unreserved confidence.

The first question that will always occur to an awakened sinner, hath been expressed by the prophet Micah in these words: “Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God?” And the only answer to this question, which an unenlightened mind can suggest, hath also been expressed by the same prophet, in the form of another question: “Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves of an year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” A conscience alarmed with a sense of guilt, naturally represents the Most High as clothed with terrible majesty, as a God of vengeance, a stern unrelenting creditor, demanding payment even to the uttermost farthing. And however the advocates for

the light of nature may boast of their discoveries, it may be pronounced impossible for unassisted reason, proceeding on sound principles, to discover any means whereby guilty creatures can hope to satisfy the justice, or regain the friendship of their Maker. All our knowledge, with regard to this subject, must flow from revelation alone. The sanctions of justice may indeed be comprehended by human reason; but justice demands inexorably the punishment of transgressors. Justice admits no claim for the exercise of mercy. Nay, more, mercy does not even come within the strict conception of legal administration, but is an act of pure prerogative, having no other measure than the will of the sovereign. "And who knoweth the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" None else but the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, and hath declared him unto us: and this is the name whereby he hath made him known, *God is love*.

What the Apostle says, (chapter v. verse 18.) has a stronger signification than is commonly attended to. "All things are of God." It not only imports, that all things owe their existence to God, and are the effects of his creating power; but farther, that all the motives to exercise that power are of himself likewise. He finds them in his own perfect nature; and every exertion of power, whether for producing being or happiness to any of his creatures, is the spontaneous act of his essential goodness and benignity. Why did God create a world? No other answer can be given to this question, but that it was his sovereign pleasure so to do. No other reason, but the same sovereign pleasure can be assigned for man's existence on earth, with all the honours conferred on him at his first creation. And now that man hath forfeited these honours, and incurred the penalty

annexed to his disobedience, whither shall he resort to find an inducement for his Creator shewing him mercy? Can rebellion, outrageous unprovoked rebellion, furnish a motive to pity? Can deformity and pollution present any attractions of love? No; it is manifest, that after all our researches, we must finally have recourse to what God himself said to Moses of old, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.” Upon this principle the Apostle proceeds in the passage I have quoted: “All things are of God,” saith he, “who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” He it was who graciously spared those rebels whom his righteous vengeance might have crushed; and who, instead of requiring the fruit of our body for the sin of our soul, withheld not his own Son as the ransom of our transgressions, but gave him up to the death for us, that we might live through him. Having thus by his infinite wisdom, and self-moving goodness, opened a way for extending mercy to offenders, consistent with the honour of his perfections, he proceeds to complete the gracious plan, by sending forth some of the apostate race, as ambassadors for Christ, to beseech sinners in his own name, and in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God. Paul was one of these chosen instruments; and accordingly he styles himself, in the text, “a worker together with God,” and in this character beseecheth the Corinthians, in the most earnest manner, “not to receive the grace of God in vain.”

The same exhortation I now address to you, deeming it peculiarly seasonable, in the near view we have of celebrating that solemn ordinance of our religion, in

which the grace of God appears in all its lustre and glory. It seems unnecessary to employ many words in explaining the exhortation, its meaning being so clearly ascertained by the connexion in which it stands, as to be obvious to every intelligent reader. All that is needful to be observed, is, that we are to look for the true import of the grace of God, which the Apostle beseecheth the Corinthians not to receive in vain, in that ministry or word of reconciliation, which he had already said was committed to himself, and to his brethren in the apostleship. This plainly appears to consist of two parts.

1st. The declaration of an important fact, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself.” And,

2dly, An exhortation founded on this fact, “We pray you in Christ’s stead be ye reconciled to God.” Hence it is evident, that receiving the grace of God imports neither more nor less than believing the fact, and complying with the exhortation; and consequently every thing short of this is receiving the grace of God in vain. Without any further explanation, therefore, I shall now proceed to press the exhortation, by the most powerful arguments that I am able to present to your minds.

Let me beseech you, then, not to receive the grace of God in vain, by the consideration of the misery and abject bondage of your condition, while you continue thus perverse and ungrateful. I will not enter into any speculative disquisition with regard to the pretensions of natural religion. Whether those who never heard of the grace of God revealed in the gospel may yet be saved, by the efficacy of an unknown atonement, is a question with which we have little concern. I speak at present to those whose fate has nothing to do with the determination of this question. What say the Scriptures of truth with respect to them? “He that believeth on the Son

hath life." Ponder what follows, "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." How awful are these words! "God is angry with the wicked every day. He hath bent his bow and made it ready; he hath also prepared for him the instruments of death." And O how hopeless a warfare is that which you have undertaken! Is there any that ever hardened himself against God and prospered? Is there any strong hold or lurking place, where the enemies of his government may be safe? Go, try the whole creation round. Ascend to heaven, and he is there in the brightness of his majesty. Go down to the regions of darkness, and he is there in the severity of his justice. Take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the sea, even there his boundless dominion extends; even there his right hand shall hold thee a prisoner to his vengeance. Go, ask protection from the highest angel, and he will tell you that one sin ruined myriads of his companions; and how then should he protect you from the penalty of multiplied transgressions? And if so exalted a being cannot help you, what can you hope from any other part of the creation? "Surely in vain is salvation looked for from the hills and from the mountains." There is no other deliverer than this Jesus whom we preach. He is the alone surety that can pay all our debt; and even he can profit us nothing, till we receive him into our hearts by faith. Till that happy moment, the weight of all our sins lies on ourselves; and nothing but the brittle thread of life suspends us from sinking for ever into the pit where there is no hope.

But the prospect of impending misery is not the only circumstance that characterizeth your unhappy condition. Present bondage, distracting and disgraceful bondage, is no less just a description of your state. The en-

emy of God and man rules in your hearts, and by his imperious commands, all your inclinations and actions are swayed. It is possible, indeed, that this shameful slavery may be unknown to yourselves. You may flatter yourselves with a supposed liberty, and even boast of your freedom from those restraints to which the religious part of mankind are subject. But be assured this is no proof that your shackles are not real and binding. The tyrant to whom you are subject rules by deceit still more than by force; and all his artifices are used to blind the eyes of his prisoners. Nay, it may be asserted with confidence, that if you have not felt your chains, if you have not been conscious of a struggle in getting free of them, your redemption is not yet begun; for violence there must be, and violence that cannot but be felt ere the usurper of your liberty be dethroned. Such then is your unhappy and disgraceful condition, while ye receive the grace of God in vain. And let me remind you, that this is no painting of mine. I have only declared what the oracles of truth have pronounced; and to their sentence you must submit, or take the bold step of calling God a liar. In the

2d place, Let me beseech you not to receive the grace of God in vain, by the consideration of the happiness of those who give it a full and cordial reception. Every one of this happy number is justified from the guilt of all his iniquities; and say, whether you have well weighed the value even of this lowest privilege of believers? I am aware that thoughtless transgressors can have no conception of its importance; in their mad and desperate folly, they even make a mock at sin, and deride the fears of the contrite and penitent. But go ask the pardoned sinner what he thinks of the benefit of forgiveness. Hear the grateful accents of one who spoke from deep

and thorough experience: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity:—For day and night thine hand was heavy on me, so that my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. Thou hast brought up my soul from the grave; thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down into the pit; thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness. Therefore shall every one that is godly pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found; and I will give thanks unto thee, O Lord my God, for ever and ever.” But this forgiveness, precious and invaluable as it is, is only the introductory blessing bestowed on those who give the grace of God a full and cordial reception. Being justified by faith, they have peace with God, and peace with their own conscience. The cause of enmity being removed, they are restored to friendship with their Maker. God is not ashamed to be called their Father, nor reluctant to bestow on them all the blessings and honours that pertain to his children. Hence the rapturous gratitude of the apostle John, too big for expression, and yet, by the very want of expression, more forcible than the most descriptive eloquence. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” The meanest individual, nay, the most abandoned sinner that now hears me, may yet become an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ, a king and priest unto God, and a pillar in the heavenly temple, never to be removed. Let your desires soar to the greatest height, stretch your imaginations to the utmost—yet the liberality of God will be still more unbounded. Much

he hath promised to bestow on his people, and many similitudes he hath condescended to use, that their slow minds might be assisted in conceiving his bounty; but no where hath he said, this is all your portion, or beyond this no more is to be expected. No, his bounty will be an everlasting fountain, and benefits for ever shall nourish eternal gratitude in the bosoms of the redeemed. "For he that spared not his own Son, but gave him up to the death for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things." Peruse the valedictory discourse of our Lord to his disciples, and learn from it what you may lawfully expect from a reconciled Father. All your prayers shall be heard. The Comforter, even the Holy Ghost, shall come into your hearts, and lead you into the knowledge of all truth. Ye shall be made fruitful in the works of righteousness. God himself shall make his abode with you. Ye shall be kept from the evil of the world while in it, and at last ye shall be where your exalted Redeemer is, to behold his glory, and to partake of his bliss.

And shall these considerations be still insufficient to determine your choice? O wonder not at the unbelieving Jews, who persecuted and slew the Lord of life. Let not your indignant sentiments rise at their injustice and cruelty. Their sin and folly were light compared with yours, who now reject his counsel and despise his grace. Their scorn was excited by his mean appearance, and they hid their faces from him, because disguised in the form of a servant. But I will tell you a thing more horrible and astonishing. The Son of God, clothed in all the mild glory of an exalted Saviour, and stretching forth his hands to bestow all the blessings purchased with his blood, is still despised and rejected. And thou, O impenitent sinner, art the man guilty of this con-

tempt and ingratitude ; yet, blessed be God, though you may justly be charged with this almost incredible guilt, I am still warranted to beseech you, in the

3d and *last* place, Not to receive the grace of God in vain, by the consideration of the riches of his long-suffering and forbearance. Long as his mercy has been insulted, it is still in your offer. I need not appeal to particular passages of Scripture to confirm this comfortable truth. It appears conspicuously through the whole tenor of revelation, every page of which contains the language of love and compassion to sinners. Review the history of Jesus, and after you have seen what he hath already done for our sakes, try if you can possibly question his good-will. Did he condescend to be clothed with our mortal flesh, and will he disdain the entertainment of an affectionate and grateful heart? Did he bleed and die on the cross for our sins, and will he fail to perfect his work in our salvation? It was a powerful argument which the apostle Paul employed on a certain occasion with Agrippa, “Believest thou the Prophets?” So say I to you, Do you believe the history of your Saviour, as recorded by four evangelists? How do you read them? What was it that affected him with grief? was it not the hardness of men’s hearts? What was it that drew tears from his compassionate eyes? was it not the view of Jerusalem, that impenitent city, which knew not, or regarded not, the day of its merciful visitation? Nay, what was the errand on which he solemnly declared himself to be come into the world? was it not to “seek and to save them who were lost?” And O will ye counteract, by your obstinate folly, all these gracious intentions on his part? Will ye persist in rejecting his grace, until ye have extorted vengeance and indigna-

tion from him whose heart is love? How dreadful, in that case, must your doom be! As ye love your souls, be warned in time against this desperate, this ruinous madness. The gracious call still resounds in your ears, "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." And we, as ambassadors, are still charged to "beseech you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

And now let me ask, what impression these plain and obvious remonstrances have made on your minds? What may be their effect, I cannot foretell. This I know, that could I hope to succeed better, I would with pleasure come down, and address each of you, even on my bended knees, obtesting you by every solemn, every tender argument, to fly from the wrath to come. I easily foresee the time when the remembrance of this offered grace shall either fill you with joy unutterable, or with fruitless and everlasting anguish. For whatever thoughtless sinners may imagine, no word of God shall ever return to him void, but shall accomplish the purpose for which he sends it. "We are a sweet savour to God," saith the apostle Paul, "in you that believe, and in you that perish; to the one we are the savour of life unto life, and to the other of death unto death." I am aware that pleadings of this kind are sometimes treated with ridicule; but the time is at hand when the scoffer shall be made sober. The view of death may do it—the day of judgment certainly will.

Now then is the accepted time. Now you may obtain an interest in this Saviour; and if you apply to him, as sure as God liveth, you shall find mercy. Thus far I can go, but one step farther I cannot proceed upon sure ground. I cannot promise you on any future time. If

you reject the counsel of God now, I cannot assure even the youngest of you of another opportunity. Before to-morrow your doom may be fixed unalterably. May God enable you to profit by these instructions, and to his name be praise. *Amen.*

SERMON LXXIII.

1 JOHN ii. 15.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: If any man love the world, the love of the FATHER is not in him.

FROM these words I propose, by divine assistance,

I. To describe that excessive or sinful love of the world, from which the Apostle here dissuades us.

II. To inquire wherein the malignity of this sin consists.

III. To lay before you a few symptoms of a worldly mind, and examine some of the apologies upon which men flatter themselves with being free of it. And,

IV. To enforce the exhortation, and give some directions how to get this undue affection towards earthly things mortified and subdued.

I. It will readily occur to you, that the exhortation is to be understood under certain restrictions. The place of his works which God has appointed us to inhabit, cannot in itself be supposed an object deserving our aversion or dislike. This would be to impeach the good-

ness of our Creator, and to tax his handy-work with imperfection. We may lawfully love the world, as it is the workmanship of God, and the mirror in which we behold the perfections of the invisible Creator. Creation is a large instructive volume, and the sense of every line is God. The proper use of all the creatures is to lead us upwards to him that made them, and to kindle in our souls the warmest gratitude to that unwearied Benefactor, who has provided so liberally for our comfort and happiness. They are naturally the means of supporting our bodies while we are employed in those duties which we owe to God, and they also enable us to supply the wants of others, to lessen the miseries, and to heighten the lawful joys of our fellow creatures. On all these accounts we may and ought to value them as real blessings, which may be improved to the most important purposes.

But our love of the world becomes excessive and sinful, when we give it that room in our hearts which is only due to God; when it is desired for its own sake, as a sufficient portion independent of his favour and friendship. If the world will keep its due place, it may be valued and esteemed in that place; but if it usurp an higher station, and promise more than it is able to give, it must be rejected, as a deceiver, with abhorrence and contempt. When we seek after earthly things, merely that our inordinate desires may be gratified, that the pride of our hearts may be cherished, or our ambition attain its object; when we are not contented with our daily bread, and that portion of the good things of life which is sufficient to sustain us during our pilgrimage to a better country—then is our love of the world undue and excessive; and the more we desire it under such

views, the worse, the more corrupted and estranged from the love of God, will our hearts become. This leads me,

II. To inquire wherein the malignity of this sin consists. This will be most effectually illustrated by considering how deeply it taints the whole character and principles of action.

There are sins which only engage particular faculties of our nature in their service. Thus the love of pleasure is chiefly seated in the senses and the imagination. While these are strongly agitated by a particular enticement, conscience may indeed be totally overpowered for a season, and the person be carried along by an headstrong irresistible impulse: But the moral faculties have afterwards leisure to resume their influence; reason is again at liberty to represent the pernicious consequences of transgression; and experience is always at hand, to convince the sinner how inconvenient and dangerous his forbidden pleasures are.

But no such checks are ready to occur to the man in whom the love of the world predominates. His sin is of deliberate choice, and engages the whole man in pursuit of its own ends. It is not an error about the means, it is not seeking a right end in a mistaken way; but it is pursuing a false and pernicious end, with care, anxiety, and self-approbation. Hence it is called in Scripture IDOLATRY, not from any resemblance it has to the outward act of falling down before stocks or stones, but because it entirely displaces our affections from their proper object, and leads them to the preference of an unjust and delusive rival. Hence it is asserted, by the apostle James, that "the friendship of the world is enmity to God." It is not merely a want of affection to our Maker, which more or less characterizes every sin; but it is an absolute opposition and hatred to him, so that, in the lan-

guage of the text, "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

From these considerations it is evident, that this sin stands as it were at the most remote distance from repentance. It overspreads the mind so entirely, as to leave in it no sound principle to withstand the progress of complete alienation from God. It resembles those diseases which do not attack one part of the body only, but which invade the whole constitution; and resembles such diseases in another respect also, that the person is seldom convinced of their reality, until the approach of a fatal termination renders it impossible for him longer to deceive himself.

This reasoning is confirmed by experience. No fault in the mind is in fact so rarely cured as a worldly disposition. Age and experience, which often bring a remedy with them for other follies, only confirm and increase the habits of an earthly mind. Even on the brink of the grave, when every other passion and desire has been extinguished, it has been known to occupy the departing spirit with an anxiety little, if it all inferior, to that which animated its most active pursuits.

Such is the peculiar malignity and dangerous nature of this sin. But as few will defend this criminal disposition directly, and as many who are enslaved by it are ready enough to join in generally condemning it, I proceed,

III. To lay before you a few symptoms of a worldly mind, and to examine some of the apologies upon which men flatter themselves with being free of it.

1st, then, We love the world plainly to excess, when we use any unlawful means to obtain its advantages. This is a mark which cannot well be controverted; and yet how many will it involve in the charge of a worldly

mind! Prove yourselves, then, by this characteristic. Would any prospect of gain tempt you to cheat or dissemble? Will your consciences allow you to go beyond or defraud your neighbour, providing you can do it in a way so secret as to defy human discovery? Does it seem a light matter to you, to take advantage of the simplicity or ignorance of others in the course of business? If so, your minds are indeed deeply corrupted; and it is not regard to God or his law, but to your own credit and safety, which restrains you from the most flagrant acts of injustice. Such persons may assure themselves, without further examination, that the love of the Father is not in them, and that their hearts are wholly alienated from God: For, as the Apostle to the Romans argues, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness.” And “no man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other; ye cannot serve God and Mammon.”

2dly. We love the world to excess, when in the enjoyment of its good things we are ready to say, with the rich man represented in our Lord’s parable, “Soul, take thine ease, thou hast goods laid up for many years, eat, drink, and be merry.” Too much complacency, in what we possess, is no less an evidence of a worldly mind than an excessive desire of more. Examine yourselves, then, with regard to the source whence you derive your pleasures—from heaven or from earth—from the abundance of corn and wine, and oil, or from the light of God’s reconciled countenance. Can you surrender yourselves to the relish of earthly enjoyments without any acknowledgment of him who bestows them?

When riches increase, do you yield yourselves to the satisfactions arising from them, without considering the true state of your souls, whether they be growing in the favour of God, and in meetness for the heavenly inheritance? If so, the world has deceived you, and God has little room in your affections.

3dly. The world predominates in your hearts, when it engrosses the principal train of our thoughts; when it is the last idea that possesseth us when we lie down, and the first when we arise; when it distracts us in our attendance on the duties of religion, interrupts our devotion in prayer, diverts our attention in hearing, and fetters our minds in meditation. I mean not to assert, that every degree of influence which it has in these respects betrays its absolute ascendancy over the mind; for who then could free himself of this charge? But when these worldly thoughts engross the mind by its own consent, when they make us grudge the time bestowed on religion, and eager to resume our earthly occupations, as soon as we have lulled our consciences with an unmeaning attendance on its ordinances—when, like the Jews of old, we say of the Sabbath, “what weariness! when will it be over, that we may sell corn?”—This is not only a preferring of the world to God, but in reality a solemn mockery of him, not less provoking than open profanity itself. The

4th and last mark of a worldly mind which I shall mention, is unmercifulness to the poor. Those who have a large measure of temporal goods bestowed on them, ought certainly, in proportion to their abundance, contribute to the necessities of their fellow creatures.

This is evidently the design of Providence in permitting, or rather appointing, such extreme diversities of condition in the world. But too many of the opulent

seem to think no such duty required of them. They flatter themselves that they do all that is incumbent on them in this respect, if, by the plenty of their tables, the splendour of their dwellings, the sumptuousness of their equipage, and other articles of their luxury, they find employment for the poor by providing for their consumption. This, indeed, is an eventual benefit to society, but is far from absolving them from the obligation they owe to it, much less does it acquit them of their duty to him who favoured them with such distinguished blessings : For what mark of gratitude to God is it, that we consume his bounty upon our own pleasures, although, in so doing, we cannot avoid distributing a part of it to our fellow creatures ?

Such persons, whatever they may think of themselves, how remote soever they may think a worldly character from being applicable to them, are in fact deeply chargeable with it. Perhaps they even do give a part of their superfluity for the relief of their brethren, and estimating that by its proportion to what others give, and not to the extent of their own means, think themselves uncommonly bountiful. But this is a gross deception, and will be found so in the day when every false pretence shall be detected before the judgment-seat of Christ. Then shall they be found among those who loved the world, and in whose hearts the love of the Father had no place.

These symptoms, if properly attended to, may be of considerable use towards discovering the true state of your characters in this respect. But as the heart is deceitful, and as we are extremely prone to flatter ourselves that we are free of this criminal disposition, it may be proper to endeavour, before closing this head of discourse, to detect some of those false apologies upon

which men flatter themselves that they are not chargeable with it.

One concludes thus in his own favour, because he is poor, and necessity obliges him to work for his daily bread. How (says he) should I be suspected of a criminal love to the world, when I possess so little of it, and can, by all my labour, procure so few of its advantages? But this is a very deceitful ground of reasoning. He who lacks riches, may love them as well as he who possesses them: And therefore if you be discontented with your state; if you envy those above you; if, in your habits of thought, you consider wealth and happiness as inseparable; and if your diligence to prepare for another world be not superior to your industry in endeavouring to obtain a share of this: the *world* is still your *idol*, “and the love of the Father is not in you.”

Another flatters himself that he has no undue attachment to the world, because he does not project for himself any great or extensive acquisitions in it, very small matters would satisfy him, and a moderate competence is all that he desires. But if your hearts are more set on these supposed moderate matters than on the heavenly inheritance, you are still slaves to the world; and the more mean and inexcusable you are that your object is so trifling and inconsiderable.

Besides, this is a very indecisive mode of reasoning. He that engages to seek only a *competence*, takes on himself a very easy engagement, because he binds himself only to a condition which is to be ascertained by his own opinion. The most covetous man on earth may make the same profession, provided you leave him to be the judge of what that competency amounts to. Look above you to the superior ranks of society, and see whether their extensive possessions extinguish their desires

for more. Is not the reverse the fact? The richest are often in as great necessity as the most indigent—as often, at least (and it is not seldom) as the imaginary wants created by luxury exceed their means of gratifying them. The decisive inquiry is not how much you desire, but for what ends you desire it.

A third conceives a favourable opinion of himself, because he uses no unlawful means to rise in the world. Now this is in so far good, and would to God we could all say as much for ourselves. But even this is not decisive in the point; for a man may love the world inordinately, who would neither steal, nor rob, nor dissemble, in order to enrich himself. The fact is, that those who have a just and steady sense of their interest, find that these are by no means the best ways of advancing it.

A good character is so necessary to carrying on worldly business of any kind with success, that a *wise man in his generation* will be fair and honest in his dealings, from mere regard to his own advantage. But with all this prudential regard, coinciding with seeming virtue, his affections may be entirely placed on the world to the exclusion of things spiritual and everlasting; which is the very character described and condemned in the text.

But saith a fourth, it is impossible that I should love the world to excess, for it is the very vice which I principally hate and condemn in others. But, alas! so do many thousands who are themselves abject slaves to the world, to the conviction of every person but themselves. It would indeed be utterly astonishing to observe, how keenly worldly men inveigh against the same dispositions in others, if this account of the appearance did not offer itself, viz. that the more they are rivals in this love, the more mutual jealousy and resentment must arise in their minds; or, to speak without any figure, the more

covetous their neighbours are, the more they stand in the way to prevent their obtaining the emoluments they desire for themselves.

I will mention but one more pretence by which men deceive themselves in the respect we are considering, and that is the resolution of leaving their substance to charitable purposes when they die. But ah! what an absurd delusion is this, to offer their worldly possessions to God after they have abused them as they could, and can now retain them no longer. But upon this point I need not dwell longer; for although an abuse very common in former times, it is one with which the present age is not peculiarly chargeable. "Be not deceived then, God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." *Amen.*

SERMON LXXIV.

1 JOHN ii. 15.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world; if any man love the world, the love of the FATHER is not in him.

I HAVE already described that excessive love of the world, from which the Apostle here dissuades us, and represented to you the greatness and malignity of this sin. I also laid before you some symptoms of an earthly mind, and endeavoured to detect the falsehood of those

pretences, by which too many impose on their consciences, and flatter themselves that their love of the world is no greater than it ought to be. I now proceed to enforce the exhortation, and to offer a few directions for the help of those who are desirous of having their affections weaned from the world, that they may rise upward to spiritual things.—Consider then,

I. THAT this undue attachment to the world is absolutely inconsistent with the love of God. This is the Apostle's argument in the text: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."—"No man." said our blessed Lord, "can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Hence covetous men are styled idolaters. They reject the true God, and substitute an idol in his room; they put the creature in place of the Creator, and make the gifts of his bounty, which should knit their hearts to him, the occasions of alienating their affections from him.

I am aware that worldly men are very unwilling to acknowledge this charge, and would be highly offended should any accuse them directly of hating the God that made them. There is something so monstrous and shocking in the idea of hatred and enmity against God, that it is scarcely to be supposed any thinking man can reconcile himself to it. But be assured this charge, however odious it may appear, will be made good against every worldly man at last; and, therefore, as you would avoid the shame of standing before the judgment-seat in such a character, labour to get your affections divorced from earthly things, and henceforth let God be supreme in your hearts. Consider,

II. THAT an immoderate love of the world is not less

foolish than sinful. "All that is in the world," saith the Apostle, in the verse following the text, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof." Many of its enjoyments are imaginary as well as transient. The pleasure and happiness we expect from them have no foundation in the nature of things, but depend entirely on a diseased corrupt fancy. If we look back to the history of mankind in all ages, the discontented and miserable will be as often found among the prosperous and affluent as among the poor and depressed conditions of life. Those situations which appear so desirable as objects of expectation, are often in experience found marvellously barren of real happiness. Whence does this arise? Is it not from the wise appointment of God, that nothing here below should satisfy the desires of an immortal creature? Vanity is, for this reason, engraved in deep and legible characters on all things below the sun; and he that pursues the good things of this world as his only portion, will inevitably find that the most fortunate experience of life will never amount to a solid happiness, in which the heart of man can find rest and satisfaction. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase." Therefore said our Lord to the multitude, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

Nature is easily satisfied; but when men create for themselves imaginary wants, they only provide an inexhaustible stock of solicitude and disappointment. The craving appetite will still be crying, Give, give; and the fulness of their sufficiency they will be in want. What has the world ever done for its most devoted servants,

that should make you desire it so greedily? Solomon went as far as any man ever did, both in the acquisition and enjoyment of earthly things, and in the conclusion passed this sentence on the review of all his experience, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” And have you discovered an art of extracting comfort from the creatures beyond what the wisest of men was able to do? What do you seriously expect from the world? Will it prevent or remove sickness? Will it ward off the stroke of death? or will it even administer any consolation to you at that trying season? Should one come to you on your death-bed, when your spirits are languishing, your hearts failing, and your bodies possessed with racking pain, and begin to console you by representing your vast acquisitions of wealth, would his words be reviving? Will it afford you any joy to contemplate those possessions, from which you are presently to be divorced for ever? You cannot think so. You must be sensible, that all things below the sun will prove miserable comforters in dying moments, and that the favour of God will then appear infinitely more desirable than ten thousand worlds. What infatuation then is it to set your hearts supremely on that which you know will appear most contemptible at last?—Consider,

III. THAT as the love of the world to excess is sinful and foolish, so it is also pernicious and fatal. “They that will be rich,” saith the Apostle to Timothy, “fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil.”

It were an endless task to enumerate all the dismal effects of this sordid disposition. “From whence come wars and fightings?” saith the apostle James; “Come

they not hence, even of your lusts which war in your members? Ye lust and have not; ye kill and desire to have, and cannot obtain." It is this which engenders strife and contention, and almost every evil work. It destroys the tranquillity of the person possessed by it; it incites him to trespass on the rights and enjoyments of others; and on both these accounts is often punished with remarkable judgments, even in the present life. How awful is that curse pronounced by the prophet Habakkuk! "Wo to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil. Thou hast consulted shame to thyself, and hast sinned against thy soul; for the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it."—How dismal was the fate of Ananias and Sapphira!—How horrible the end of Judas Iscariot! In both these instances the saying of the wise man, (Prov. i. 19.) was remarkably verified, "the greediness of gain taketh away the life of the owners thereof." But although they should escape in this world, yet they shall not escape the damnation of hell. Then shall they find that riches will not profit them in the day of God's wrath.

There is a striking passage to this purpose, (James v. 1.) "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten; your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last day." Such is the present wretchedness and the miserable portion at last of an earthly mind. Whereas,

IV. A heart disengaged from this excessive love of the world would not only prevent all this misery, but

likewise, give us the true relish of life, and make death itself easy and comfortable. Take away earthly things from a worldly man, and you take away his all; but the same things withdrawn from an heavenly minded Christian, do not annihilate his fund of happiness. When the streams of created comforts fail, he resorts to the fountain; when the creatures forsake him, he can rejoice in the Creator, and joy in the God of his salvation. The good things he possesseth have a peculiar relish, which earthly minds are incapable of feeling. He sees the bounty of God in every gift, and the faithfulness of his covenant in every comfort he enjoys. He, therefore, eats his bread with joy, and drinks his wine with a merry heart; and while he thus sits cheerfully at the feast which Providence has set before him, he fears not the intrusion of any unwelcome messenger to interrupt his peace. He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed trusting in the Lord. Prepared for all the vicissitudes of life, adversity can take nothing from him, which, in the discipline of his own mind, he has not resigned already. Nay, death itself, that presentiment so dreadful to the worldly mind, is to him, in a great measure, divested of its terrors: For he knows, “that if this earthly house of his tabernacle were dissolved, he has a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Having thus endeavoured to enforce the exhortation in the text, it only remains that I offer a few directions for the help of those who are desirous to have their affections weaned from the world, that they may rise upwards to spiritual things.

1st. Let us beware of receiving too flattering a picture of the world into our minds, or of expecting more from it than it is able to bestow. Let us correct our florid

and gaudy expectations, and make a sober estimate of its real amount. For this purpose go sometimes to the house of mourning, rather than to the house of feasting. Behold there the untimely hand of death, taking away the desire of the eyes with a stroke, blasting the most virtuous joys of humanity, tearing asunder the dearest connexions, demolishing the painted tapestry, and hanging up in its place the solemn sable and escutcheon.

Such objects, viewed with seriousness and attention, are far more profitable than the gilded scenes of mirth and gaiety; they check that wantonness which is the growth of ease and prosperity, and lead us to reflect that this world is not our home, but a foreign land, in which our vexations and disappointments are designed to turn our views towards that higher and better state, which we are destined to inherit.

2dly. Be very suspicious of a prosperous state, and fear the world more when it smiles than when it frowns. It is difficult to possess much of it, without loving it to excess. The great enemy of our souls is well aware of this, and therefore would give all his servants liberal portions in this world, were it in his power. This was his last effort in the train of temptations which he addressed to our Lord in the wilderness, and when this failed he immediately departed from him.

There is not a more salutary maxim in religious concerns, than always to suspect danger where we feel much delight. If our situation be such as entirely pleases our natural desires, it is high time to look well to the soul, and to set a strict guard on our heart, lest, by these pleasing enjoyments, they should be betrayed and alienated from God, who alone has a right to them.

3dly. Make a wise improvement of the afflictions with which you may at any time be visited. Beware of

repining under them, or thinking them greater evils than they really are ; but rather believe that they are graciously sent for the benefit of your souls, to mortify your inordinate affections to the present world. “ Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”—Nay, the seasonable visitation of temporal calamities, is included in the tenor of that everlasting covenant, which is well ordered in all things and sure. Does the world then frown on you ? Are you afflicted with poverty, sickness, pain, and reproach ? Do relations grieve you ? Do friends prove unfaithful ? or are you bereaved of them by death ? Neglect not so fair an opportunity of instruction, when you have experience itself to disgrace the pretensions of the world, and your very flesh is made to feel that it is both vain and vexatious. Remember that God has sent these rough messengers to bring you home to himself. Gratefully, then, comply with his call, and choose him for your portion, leaving the world to those who have no better sources of satisfaction.

4thly. Look forward to eternity, and take a serious view of that world, wherein you must dwell for ever, after you have spent a few more days and nights in this. Remember that heaven or hell must be your everlasting abode ; and must it not be of the last importance to know which of these different states shall be your lot ? Can that man spend his time and strength in the pursuit of trifles, who believes and who considers that he is hastening to appear before God in judgment, when his final state shall be allotted according to his present behaviour ? Must not the foresight of this awful trial disengage his mind from the world, and cure his anxiety about earthly things, by producing in him an anxiety about matters of infinitely greater consequence. “ Let your moderation be known unto all men,” saith the

Apostle ; “ THE LORD IS AT HAND.” A more powerful argument could not be used. An habitual impression of this awful truth, that the Lord is at hand, that he standeth before the door, would effectually cure our feverish desires after earthly things, and awaken us to a deep concern about the interests of our precious and immortal souls.

Finally, let us be wise in time, and give the supreme affections of our hearts to God, who alone is worthy of them ; imploring, for this purpose, the aid of his Holy Spirit, to enable us to comply with his own gracious expostulation, (Isa. lv. 2.) “ Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me ; hear, and your souls shall live ; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David.” *Amen.*

FINIS.



